

# COURSE GUIDEBOOK

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## The Historical Jesus

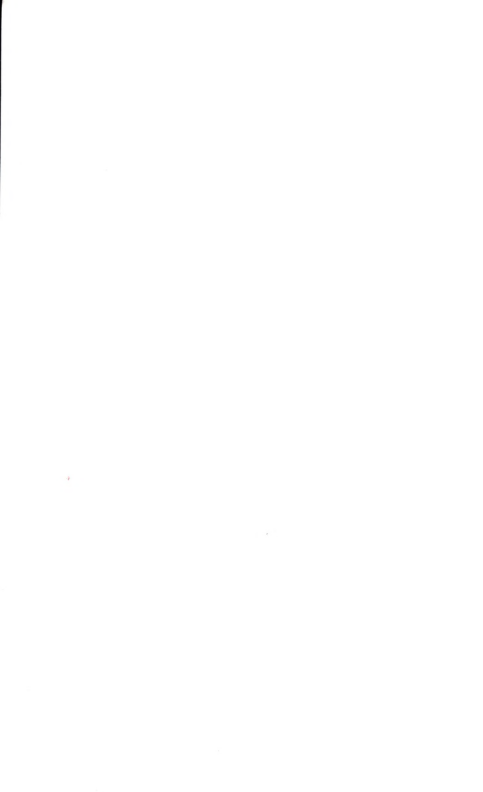
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Part II



THE TEACHING COMPANY



# Table of Contents

## The Historical Jesus

### Part II

Professor Biography .....	see Part I
Course Scope .....	see Part I
Lecture Thirteen	Jesus and Roman Rule..... 1
Lecture Fourteen	Jesus the Apocalyptic Prophet..... 6
Lecture Fifteen	The Apocalyptic Teachings of Jesus ..... 11
Lecture Sixteen	Other Teachings of Jesus..... 15
Lecture Seventeen	The Deeds of Jesus..... 19
Lecture Eighteen	Still Other Words and Deeds..... 24
Lecture Nineteen	How Was Jesus Received? ..... 30
Lecture Twenty	The Last Days of Jesus..... 36
Lecture Twenty-One	The Last Hours of Jesus ..... 42
Lecture Twenty-Two	The Death and Resurrection of Jesus ..... 47
Lecture Twenty-Three	The Afterlife of Jesus ..... 52
Lecture Twenty-Four	The Prophet of the New Millennium..... 57
Timeline .....	See Part I
Glossary .....	See Part I
Biographical Notes .....	63
Annotated Bibliography .....	66



## **Lecture Thirteen**

### **Jesus and Roman Rule**

**Scope:** Rome ruled Palestine much as it did the other provinces of the Empire. Roman or local aristocrats were appointed to run normal operations of government; their ultimate responsibilities were to raise revenue for Rome and to keep the peace. In some ways, Rome granted favored treatment to the Jews of Palestine, but Roman rule was nonetheless felt by many to be an unbearable burden.

Jews responded to Roman rule in a variety of ways: at Passover in Jerusalem, there was a type of silent protest against foreign domination and a not-so-veiled expression of hope that God would intervene once again on behalf of his people; nonviolent resistance to Roman policies; occasionally, they engaged in acts of armed rebellion, including the Jewish War of AD 66–70 that left Jerusalem ruins. Throughout the period, prophets arose to speak out against Rome as God's enemies and were often killed as troublemakers.

One form of resistance ideology became prominent in the period. Called "apocalypticism" by modern scholars, this ideology claimed that the forces of evil that were currently in charge of this world and responsible for its suffering would be overthrown by God in a mighty act of judgment. This imminent event was thought to be the prelude to the appearance of God's kingdom in a utopian age preserved for God's people. We have compelling reasons for thinking that Jesus himself proclaimed some such apocalyptic views.

### **Outline**

- I. In the last lecture, we saw the importance of situating Jesus in his own historical context.
  - A. Jesus was a first-century Palestinian Jew. To understand him, we need to know something about the historical and social context of Judaism in Palestine in the first-century.
  - B. One consequences of foreign subjugation of Palestine included the formation of Jewish sects, which exercised some power and offered religious options for Jews living at the time.
    - 1. The Pharisees emphasized keeping the law of God to the fullest degree possible and developed a set of oral laws to ensure this.
    - 2. The Sadducees emphasized worshiping God in the Temple in strict accordance with the Torah, the Law of Moses.
    - 3. The Essenes emphasized maintaining their own purity in light of the imminent apocalypse in which God would judge the world and his own people.

4. The Fourth Philosophy emphasized the Jewish homeland and their divinely appointed right and duty to reestablish Israel as a sovereign state, by force if necessary.
- II. The Roman imperial authorities treated the Jews of Palestine much as they treated those in other conquered territories they ruled as provinces. Rome formed conquered lands into provinces ruled either by Roman aristocrats appointed as governors or by local aristocrats designated as client kings.
- A. When Jesus was born, all of Palestine was ruled by a client king, Herod; when Jesus died, the northern part of Israel, Galilee, was ruled by one of Herod's sons, but Judea in the south was ruled by a Roman governor, Pontius Pilate.
  - B. Roman governors and client kings had two principal obligations to the Empire: to raise revenues and to keep the peace. Local administrators were left to do what needed to be done in view of local circumstances.
    1. The Romans did not have troops all throughout the conquered territories. Most Jews in Palestine probably never saw a Roman soldier. Soldiers were stationed on the frontiers to protect against invasion.
    2. In Palestine a force of soldiers was kept by the Roman governor at his residence in Caesarea on the coast, for use in case of any local disturbance. At Passover, the governor took his troops to Jerusalem to quell any potential trouble.
  - B. The principal burden that Jews in Palestine bore was the requirement to pay taxes to the Empire, in the form of crops and monies.
    1. In monetary terms, the Roman tax burden on Jews appears to have been average, about twelve or thirteen percent of income to support the Roman presence in the land.
    2. These taxes were on top of taxes to support the Temple and local Jewish administration, perhaps an additional twenty percent.
    3. This may not appear exorbitant by the standards of today's highly industrialized nations; we must recall, however, that in ancient agrarian societies, most farmers did well to eke out an existence in the best of circumstances.
  - C. Since the days of Julius Caesar, Jews were not required to supply Rome with soldiers, nor were they required to provide direct support for Roman legions stationed nearby or marching through to the frontiers.
  - D. In another respect, the Jewish situation could be seen as far worse than average. Many Jews considered it blasphemous to pay taxes to support Roman administration of the land that God had given them.
- III. Throughout the first century, Jews of Palestine resisted Roman rule on a number of occasions and in a number of different ways.
- A. Many Jews engaged in simple silent protests against foreign rule as, for example, during the Passover festival described earlier.

1. The festival was explicitly a commemoration of God's deliverance of Israel from an oppressive foreign power in earlier times (from Egypt under Moses).
  2. Many Jews celebrated the feast because they anticipated that God would do it again (free them from Rome under...the messiah?).
  3. Romans understood full well the political implications of the feast, which is why they brought in troops for the occasion
  4. On occasion, the Roman presence had the opposite of its desired effect. For example, in the 50s, during the reign of the procurator Cumanus, a soldier made an indecent gesture to the crowds. They picked up stones, the soldiers moved in, and—according to Josephus (who may have exaggerated the numbers)—20,000 Jews were killed in the mayhem.
- B.** On some occasions, a Roman administrator would offend the Jews in Palestine, and they would respond through nonviolent protest. During Jesus' lifetime, when Pilate assumed the prefecture of Judea (AD 26), he set up Roman standards with the image of Caesar throughout Jerusalem. Josephus says that Jews in the city erupted in protest and staged a kind of sit-in; after five days and several failed threats of killing the lot of them, Pilate backed down.
- C.** A very few violent insurrections also occurred in Palestine during the first century.
1. The most significant and disastrous one came thirty-five to forty years after Jesus' death, when Roman atrocities (e.g., the plundering of the Temple treasury) led to widespread revolt.
  2. The Romans sent in the legions from the north and quickly subjugated Galilee (Josephus, recall, was the commander of the Jewish troops). A group of Galilean Jews fled to Jerusalem and provoked a bloody civil war against the priestly aristocracy who had been in charge of the Temple and the rest of the city. Once they acquired control, these "Zealots" pressed the fight against the Romans to the end.
  3. This led to a horrifying three-year siege of Jerusalem, with massive starvation within the walls. The war ended in a bloodbath in which tens of thousands of Jews were slaughtered or enslaved, rebel leaders were crucified, much of the city was leveled, and the Temple was burned to the ground in AD 70.
- D.** A fourth form of protest involved a more obviously "religious" response. Throughout this period, we know of self-styled prophets who predicted that God would soon intervene on behalf of his people to overthrow the forces of evil that ruled them
1. As mentioned in Josephus and briefly in Acts, less than fifteen years after Jesus' crucifixion, a prophet named Theudas publicly proclaimed that he would part the Jordan River, allowing the people to cross into Israel on dry land, an obvious reference to the

traditions of Israel's exodus from Egypt. The Roman governor sent forth his troops, slaughtered Theudas and his followers, and displayed the prophet's head in Jerusalem.

2. About a decade later, another prophet arose (also mentioned in Acts), called "the Egyptian." He led a huge following (30,000 people, according to Josephus) outside of Jerusalem and predicted that he would make the "walls come tumbling down"—a clear allusion to Joshua and the Battle of Jericho. The Roman troops again were sent forth, and a huge slaughter occurred.
3. John the Baptist should probably be seen as a prophet of this sort, predicting that God would soon intervene on behalf of his people and wreak massive destruction and judgment: "Who warned you to flee from the wrath that is coming? Behold, the axe is lying at the root of the tree; every tree that does not bear fruit will be cut down and cast into the fire" (Luke 3:7, 9). He, too, was executed.
4. Other Jewish prophets arose and experienced similar fates. Roman administrators of Judea had no qualms about destroying anyone whose predictions about God's intervention gained them a large, and potentially riotous, following, especially in Jerusalem.

IV. An even more widespread response to Roman rule involved a kind of religious ideology that became popular during the period, what modern scholars call "apocalypticism." This ideology originated, probably, during the time of the Maccabean revolt, but became enormously popular among the Jews of Palestine under Roman rule.

- A. This ideology may have undergirded some of the self-styled prophets I mentioned (almost certainly John the Baptist), and it was widely held among large numbers of Jews.
- B. The name comes from the Greek term *apocalypsis*, which means an "unveiling" or a "revealing." Jews who subscribed to this world view maintained that God had revealed to them the future course of events, in which he was soon to overthrow the forces of evil and establish his good kingdom on earth.
- C. We know about Jewish apocalyptic thought from a number of ancient sources: the Book of Daniel in the Hebrew Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and numerous "apocalypses" written at the time—i.e., books that describe the course of future events as "revealed" to their authors.
- D. Jewish apocalypticists subscribed to four major tenets:
  1. They maintained a view of cosmic dualism, in which there were two forces in the world—good and evil—and everyone and everything sided with one of the two forces. The present age was ruled by the forces of evil and the age to come would be ruled by the forces of good.
  2. They were completely pessimistic about the possibilities of life in the present evil age.

3. Apocalypticists believed, though, that God would intervene in the course of history, overthrow the forces of evil, and bring in his good kingdom with a judgement of the entire world, both the living and the dead.
  4. Moreover, apocalypticists insisted that this future judgment of God against the forces of evil and the appearance of his good kingdom on earth was imminent. In the words of one famous Jewish apocalypticist: "Truly I tell you, some of you standing here will not taste death before they see the Kingdom of God come in power." These are the words of Jesus (Mark 9:1). "Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away before all these things take place" (Mark 13:30).
- E. Jesus, as presented our earliest and most historically accurate sources, seems to have adopted an apocalyptic point of view and believed that the judgment would happen in his own generation.

### **Essential Reading:**

Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction*, chap. 16.

Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, chaps. 1–4.

Sanders, *Judaism Practice and Belief*, chaps. 1–4.

### **Suggested Reading:**

Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*.

Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, chaps. 1–4.

Rowland, *Open Heaven*.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. In view of the brief description of Roman domination of the provinces given above, how does that situation (say, for Jews in Palestine) seem to be like and unlike the situation of developing countries who are under the sway of the economies and policies of major world powers today?
2. Discuss how an apocalyptic worldview might provide comfort for someone experiencing oppression and personal suffering.

## Lecture Fourteen

### Jesus the Apocalyptic Prophet

**Scope:** Now that we have examined our sources for the historical Jesus, discussed the historical criteria, and set the context for Jesus' life in first-century Palestine, we can establish what Jesus was actually like and what he said and did. The first step is to set forth the general character of Jesus' message. It appears that Jesus proclaimed an apocalyptic message, that God would soon intervene in the course of history to overthrow the forces of evil and establish his kingdom earth.

We will examine this by looking at the earliest sources at our disposal (Mark, Q, M, and L), even though it later came to be muted (Luke), altered (John), and even spurned (Thomas) and determine if the apocalyptic view of Jesus passes all three of our historical criteria.

Finally, the idea that Jesus was essentially an apocalypticist can explain *both* the beginning and the aftermath of his ministry, which clearly began with Jesus' association with an apocalyptic prophet, John the Baptist, and resulted in the establishment of apocalyptic communities of Christians throughout the Mediterranean. Jesus' ministry links the apocalyptic John and the apocalyptic Christian church.

### Outline

- I. The only way to know what Jesus actually taught is through the sources that survive from antiquity. Principally, these sources are the Gospels.
  - A. These books must be examined critically using the various historical criteria that we have already discussed. It is not good enough to object to any reconstruction of the historical Jesus simply by citing proof texts—i.e., verses that seem to say something else. Every verse in all our sources must be examined carefully, not just to see what it says and to determine what it means, but also to establish whether it actually goes back to the life of Jesus himself.
  - B. A careful examination of all the surviving evidence suggests that Jesus was a Jewish apocalypticist.
- II. The view that Jesus was an apocalypticist has been dominant among scholars for most of this century.
  - A. The view was first popularized by the classic *Quest of the Historical Jesus* written by Albert Schweitzer, the humanitarian and medical missionary who began his career as a philosopher, theologian, and New Testament scholar.
    1. Schweitzer's book discussed in detail all the attempts to write a life of Jesus down to his own day (1906), showing how scholars had

portrayed Jesus incorrectly, because they failed to recognize that he was an apocalypticist.

2. Schweitzer's own reconstruction of Jesus' life and teachings has, probably with justification, been called into question over the course of the past century, but his overriding points—that Jesus must be situated in his own first-century Palestinian context and that his message was apocalyptic—came to dominate scholarship.

B. Even this broader point of view has come into question in recent times.

III. When applied to our sources for the historical Jesus, the basic rules of thumb indicate that he probably held an apocalyptic view.

- A. We know that historians prefer sources that are closest to the time of the events they narrate and that are, insofar as possible, not tendentious.
- B. In the case of Jesus, we see a clear and consistent trend when it comes to the apocalyptic materials. The earliest sources at our disposal—Q, Mark, M, and L, for example—all portray Jesus apocalyptically. Later sources, for example, John and Thomas, do *not*. This scarcely appears to be an accident.
- C. The basic point is this: throughout the earliest accounts of Jesus' words are found numerous apocalyptic predictions: a kingdom of God is soon to appear on earth, in which God will rule; the forces of evil will be overthrown, and only those who repent and follow Jesus' teachings will be allowed to enter the kingdom; judgment on all others will be brought by the Son of Man, a cosmic figure who may arrive from heaven at any time.
- D. Jesus is said to have proclaimed this message in Q, Mark, M, and L—our earliest surviving sources. Consider the following examples: Mark 13:24–27, 30; Luke 17:24; 26–27, 30 (this is Q material; cf. Matt. 24:27, 37–39); Luke 12:39 (also Q; cf. Matt. 24:44); Matt. 13:40–43 (M); and Luke 21:34–36 (L).
- E. Some of the most clearly apocalyptic traditions are toned down as we move further away from Jesus' life to the later Gospels.
  1. Mark was our earliest Gospel and was a source for Luke (along with Q and L). We can easily see how the earlier traditions of Mark fared later in the hands of Luke. Interestingly, some of the earlier apocalyptic emphases begin to be muted.
  2. Contrast Mark 9:1 with Luke 9:27, then consider Luke 17:21 (found only in Luke). In this later Gospel, Jesus no longer says that his disciples will see the kingdom come in power, but only that the kingdom will arrive in the ministry of Jesus himself.
  3. In Luke 17:21, Luke has Jesus say that the kingdom is "in your midst." This differs from Mark's earlier "coming with power."

4. So, too, the high priest is no longer told that he himself will see the Son of Man arrive in judgment (Mark 14:62), but simply that the Son of Man would henceforth be in heaven (Luke 22:69).
  5. Luke does not seem to think that the coming of a real kingdom would occur in the lifetime of Jesus' companions. Evidently, because he was writing after they had died, and he knew that the end had not come. To deal with the "delay of the end," he made appropriate changes in Jesus' predictions.
- F. In still later sources, the apocalyptic materials are eliminated.
1. Thus, in the Gospel of John, the last of the canonical accounts to be written, the kingdom is not described as soon to come, but as already present to those who believe in Jesus (John 3:3, 36).
  2. In fact, the older view—that a day of judgment is coming and the dead will be resurrected at the end of the age—is debunked in view of the newer view, that in Jesus a person can already be raised into eternal life (John 11:23–26).
- G. This "de-apocalypticizing" of Jesus' message continues into the second century. The Gospel of Thomas, for example, written somewhat later than John, contains a clear attack on anyone who believes in a future kingdom here on earth (sayings 3, 18, 118).
- H. If we were to tally up these data to this point, we'd have a fairly compelling subtotal. Early traditions record apocalyptic teachings on the lips of Jesus. Later traditions generally mute this emphasis; still later sources explicitly argue against it.
1. It appears that, when the end did not arrive, Christians realized that Jesus said it would and changed his message accordingly.
  2. If scholars are to prefer the accounts of our earliest sources, then it's clear that the early Jesus is portrayed as an apocalypticist.
- IV. The same results accrue if we consider the apocalyptic traditions associated with Jesus in light of the specific criteria that we've discussed: contextual credibility, dissimilarity, and independent attestation.
- A. We have absolutely no trouble seeing Jesus as an apocalypticist in terms of contextual credibility.
1. First-century Palestine had numbers of apocalyptic Jews who left writings, e.g., the Dead Sea Scrolls.
  3. Other apocalyptic Jews were written about, e.g., John the Baptist (in the New Testament accounts) and various other prophets (e.g., Theudas and the Egyptian) who were mentioned by Josephus
- B. Some of the most striking apocalyptic traditions also pass the criterion of dissimilarity. I have already discussed a couple of them.
1. Mark (8:38) talks about a cosmic judge of the earth, the Son of Man, without giving any hint that the reference is to Jesus—even though that's what the earliest Christians who transmitted the

saying believed. It seems that they didn't formulate this saying, but it goes back to Jesus himself.

2. The parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25 indicates that, at this apocalyptic judgment, the Son of Man will judge the nations based on how they lived. Because this does not coincide with the view of Jesus' later followers—that salvation comes only on the basis of faith in Jesus, not on the basis of good works—the story was probably not formulated by Christians, but by Jesus himself.
  3. Some of Jesus' key apocalyptic sayings, therefore, pass both the criteria of contextual credibility and dissimilarity.
- C. Some of these sayings also pass the criterion of independent attestation.
1. Jesus is portrayed as an apocalypticist in Mark, Q, M, and L.
  2. The later Gospel of Thomas argues against this portrayal. Why argue against something unless someone else subscribes to it?
  3. All these sources were independent of one another and all of them, to a greater or lesser extent, especially the earlier sources, portray Jesus apocalyptically.
- V. A consideration of the way Jesus' ministry began and how it ended is the key to everything that lies between.
- A. There is little doubt that Jesus began his ministry by associating with, and even being baptized by, John the Baptist. The traditions are independently attested and dissimilar to what Christians would have wanted to say about Jesus.
- B. John was an apocalyptic prophet in the wilderness. Jesus could have joined forces with the Pharisees, Essenes or the Fourth Philosophy, but intentionally went to John, presumably because he stood in agreement with John's apocalyptic message of the coming judgment.
- C. There is also little doubt about the aftermath of Jesus' ministry. After his death, Christian communities were established throughout the Mediterranean.
1. We know about these communities because of the writings of their earliest leaders, such as the apostle Paul, whose writings clearly indicate that he believed he was living at the end of the age and that Jesus was soon to return from heaven in judgment against the earth (1 Thess. 4:13–5:10).
  2. The first communities of Christians were, in other words, thoroughly apocalyptic.
- D. How can we explain that the beginning and the aftermath of Jesus' ministry were both thoroughly apocalyptic?
1. If only the beginning were apocalyptic, we could claim that Jesus associated with John but then changed his mind about his apocalyptic views. That wouldn't explain why Jesus' own followers, after his death, were hard-core apocalypticists.

2. If Jesus' later followers were apocalypticists but Jesus did not begin as one, we could say that after Jesus' death, followers changed his teachings to make them coincide with their beliefs.
3. The fact that both the beginning and the end are so clearly apocalyptic is compelling evidence that the middle—Jesus' life, which provides the continuity between John the Baptist and the early Christian communities—was also apocalyptic.

**Essential Reading:**

Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet*, chap. 8.

Schweitzer, *Quest of the Historical Jesus*.

**Suggested Reading:**

Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth*.

Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, chaps. 1–4.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What strikes you as the strongest evidence that Jesus was an apocalypticist? Where does the evidence seem to you to be the weakest?
2. How would you counter an argument that said that Jesus was not an apocalypticist because he is not portrayed that way in the Gospel of John?

## Lecture Fifteen

### The Apocalyptic Teachings of Jesus

**Scope:** Jesus proclaimed that God's kingdom was coming to earth imminently. This would be a real kingdom with real rulers (the twelve disciples), a kingdom that would welcome some people but exclude others. Before the kingdom arrived, a scene of judgment would take place, in which the Son of Man, a cosmic figure from heaven, would appear to destroy God's enemies. This coming judgment would involve a massive reversal of fortunes; those who had prospered in this world through siding with evil would be taken down, but those who had suffered would be exalted. The judgment would come not to individuals, and also to institutions and governments. In particular, the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, the heart of all Jewish worship, would be destroyed.

#### Outline

- I. In the last lecture, we saw that, in the most general terms, Jesus can be labeled a first-century Jewish apocalypticist who taught that a kingdom of God was coming to earth.
  - A. I take the summary of his preaching in Mark 1:15 (the first words he is recorded to have said in that Gospel) to be reasonably accurate and thoroughly apocalyptic: the present age is nearly up; repent now.
  - B. Throughout his authentic teachings, when Jesus refers to the coming kingdom, he seems to mean an actual earthly kingdom, ruled by God. Consider the things Jesus says in early traditions found in Q:

“Truly I say to you, in the renewed world, when the Son of Man is sitting on the throne of his glory, you [disciples] also will be seated on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Matt. 19:28; cf. Luke 22:30)

“And there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom, but you are cast out; and people will come from east and west and from north and south and recline at table in the kingdom of God.” (Q: Luke 13:23–29; cf. Matt. 8:11–12)
- II. While the arrival of the kingdom was “good news” for Jesus’ followers, it was not good news for everyone. In a mighty act of judgment, evil rulers will be toppled and punished, and the oppressed will be raised up.
  - A. This judgment will be universal in scope. Compare the saying in our earliest Gospel:

“And in those days, after that affliction, the sun will grow dark and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from

heaven, and the powers in the sky will be shaken; and then they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send forth his angels and he will gather his elect from the four winds, from the end of earth to the end of heaven.” (Mark 13:24–27)

- B. This coming judgement is the subject of a number of Jesus’ parables. Consider this one that is multiply attested in Matthew and Thomas:

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net which was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, they hauled it ashore, and sitting down chose the good fish and put them into containers, but the bad fish they threw away. That’s how it will be at the completion of the age. The angels will come and separate the evil from the midst of the righteous, and cast them into the fiery furnace. There people will weep and gnash their teeth.” (Matt. 13:47–50)

- B. As seen in these references, Jesus calls this coming agent of judgment, who is regularly accompanied by angels, the “Son of Man,” a title deriving from a passage from the Hebrew Bible, Dan. 7:13–14.

1. In some of the sayings about the future coming of the Son of Man, Jesus does not appear to be speaking about himself. These sayings, pass the criterion of dissimilarity, because Christians would be unlikely to make up sayings in which it was unclear that Jesus himself was the future judge.
2. These sayings also pass the criterion of contextual credibility—cf. Enoch, ch. 69, a contemporaneous Jewish apocalyptic prophecy referring to the “son of man” as an agent of God’s judgment.
3. In other sayings, though, Jesus clearly does speak about himself using the term “son of man.” These obviously do not pass the criterion of dissimilarity.
4. As a result, we can be reasonably sure that Jesus said that a future judge of the earth, whom he called the Son of Man, was soon to be sent from heaven as a prelude to God’s kingdom.

- C. Similar teachings can be found in other apocalyptic writings from the same time period (e.g., 1 Enoch 69:4; Ezra 13:1–11).

- III. This coming judgment would involve a serious reversal: Those who are in power would be removed; those who are oppressed would be exalted.

- A. This kind of reversal of fortune makes sense in an apocalyptic context. “And so the one who exalts himself shall be humbled and the one who humbles himself shall be exalted; for the first shall be last and the last shall be first” (Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30).
- B. This is the theme of some of Jesus’ best known but least understood teachings, the Beatitudes.

1. In these teachings, notice the verb tenses, in view of Jesus' apocalyptic emphases: "Blessed are the meek, for they *shall* inherit the earth, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they *shall* be satisfied, blessed are the pure in heart, for they *shall* see God." When? In the future kingdom.
  2. And so, "blessed are those who are persecuted for doing what is right, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." God's kingdom will come to those who are beaten down, poor, hungry, and persecuted.
- IV. The coming judgment of God would involve not just individuals, but governments and institutions.
- A. In particular, Jesus is reported in independent sources to have predicted that the grand and glorious Temple in Jerusalem, the center of all Jewish religion, would be destroyed at the appearance of the Son of Man (Mark 13:1).
    1. As we will see more fully in a later lecture, even though the Temple was ordered to be built by God and was run according to his dictates in Scripture by the leaders of his own people, Jesus taught that the institution had become corrupt and was going to be overthrown by God when the Son of Man arrived.
    2. That a Jew would say such a thing about the Temple is completely credible. The prophet Jeremiah in the Hebrew Bible made a similar prediction six centuries earlier (Jeremiah 7), as did other self-styled prophets in Jesus' day, as we know from Josephus.
  - B. As we will see in a later lecture, this teaching in particular got Jesus into trouble with the ruling authorities.
- V. Jesus maintained that the Son of Man's arrival was not some far off event to be worried about at some remote time in the future. It was imminent. It would come in his own generation (Mark 8:38–9:1; 13:30).
- A. In the next lecture, we'll consider some of the ethical corollaries of Jesus' proclamation of the coming kingdom. His moral teaching was situated clearly in his apocalyptic context.
    1. Jesus did not teach his ethics to show people how to live in peace for the long haul. For him, there wasn't going to be a long haul.
    2. His ethical teachings are meant to show people what they need to do now to escape judgment when the Son of Man arrives and to be brought into the kingdom of God. Believers needed to be humble (Mark 9:35; 10:42–44); be like "little children" (Mark 10:14); give away all their possessions and all their attachments to earthly things, (Mark 10:25).
  - B. Similarly—and possibly even more strikingly—Jesus taught that it would not be the upright and religious people who are brought into the kingdom, but sinners (Matt 21:31–32; Luke 18:9–14).

1. Probably none of Jesus' teachings caused such an uproar as these. Tax collectors and prostitutes and sinners will come into the kingdom before the righteous leaders of the Jews (Matt 21:31).
  2. It is hard to know what he meant by this, but given the number of places in which Jesus urges people to repent and return to doing what God really wants, it appears that those who were exalted leaders of his people were not right before God, whereas those who humbly repented of their wicked ways were.
- E. Jesus taught that people needed to repent and live in ways God wanted them to in light of the coming kingdom. In the next lecture, we'll consider more fully what that might have entailed.

### **Essential Reading:**

Mark 10, 13; Matthew 5–7, 24–26.

Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet*, chap. 9.

Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, chaps. 11–13.

### **Suggested Reading:**

Chilton and Evans, *Authenticating the Words of Jesus*.

Meier, *A Marginal Jew*.

Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. Why have Christian readers been so reluctant to take literally Jesus' teachings about the coming Son of Man, the cosmic destruction he'll bring, and the need to give away possessions and live like slaves?
2. Read over some of the more familiar teachings of Jesus, such as the Beatitudes in Matthew 5, the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6, and the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25, and reflect on what they would mean in an apocalyptic context.

## Lecture Sixteen

### Other Teachings of Jesus

**Scope:** Jesus did more, of course, than talk about the coming apocalypse. He is widely regarded as one of the greatest ethical teachers of all time. We must realize, however, that even his teachings about ethics were situated in an apocalyptic context that radically affects their meanings. Jesus did not deliver timeless truths to guide individuals in leading long and productive lives. His teachings were meant to show people how to live to enter the kingdom of God that was soon to appear.

These teachings are based on the Law of Moses, as found in the Jewish Bible. In particular, Jesus stressed the two laws to love God above all else (Deut. 6:4) and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Lev. 19:18).

### Outline

- I. Many people today consider Jesus to be one of the greatest ethical teachers of all time, with his stress on the law to "love your neighbor as yourself" and his formulation of the "Golden Rule" that tells us "do unto others as you would have them do unto you."
  - A. Jesus' ethical teachings may have meant something quite different in his context than they do in ours.
  - B. Jesus' ethical teachings, in other words, were ethics of the coming kingdom. They reflected what life would be like in the kingdom and qualified a person to enter it once it arrived.
- II. It would be a mistake to think of Jesus' ethical teachings without considering their relation to the Jewish law. As we have seen, Jesus was fully Jewish in every way; he embraced the Jewish law and saw himself as a principal proponent and interpreter of that law.
  - A. Recall the three major ideas of Judaism:
    1. It was monotheistic, with one Creator-God.
    2. God made a covenant with the people of Israel (Abraham, Moses).
    3. The law told the Jews how to worship their God and how to live in a community of believers.
  - B. To be Jewish meant, in part, to embrace the law that God was believed to have given Moses, as embodied in the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, the Torah. Jesus regularly turns to the law as its interpreter throughout independently attested traditions; e.g., Mark 10:17-22; Luke 16:16 (Q = Matt. 5:18); Matt. 5:17, 19-20 (M); John 10:34-35.
  - C. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus constantly quotes the law and places his interpretation against the interpretations of other teachers of his day, e.g., Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes.

1. In contrast to Pharisees (as we'll see in a later lecture), Jesus did not think that God was concerned about scrupulous observance of every single detail of every law.
  2. In contrast to Sadducees, Jesus did not think that carefully adhering to the laws of how to sacrifice in the Temple would bring a person into a right standing before God.
  3. In contrast to Essenes, Jesus did not think that maintaining one's own ritual purity by separating oneself from the sinfulness of the rest of the world was ultimately what God wanted.
  4. In all these disagreements, the issue was never over whether God's law, as found in the Hebrew Bible, should be kept. The question was how it should be kept and what it meant to keep it.
- D. For Jesus, as for other Jewish teachers of his day, what God wanted was for his people to keep the commandments that formed the heart of his law, the commandments to love God above all else (Deut. 6:4) and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Lev. 19:18; Mark 12:28-34).
- E. Even though the commandment to love is simple, it is also all encompassing. Giving oneself over to the command is necessary to enter God's kingdom, which is the ultimate goal of all existence.
1. The kingdom is to be sought after as one's most prized possession (cf. the parable of the pearl of great price; Matt. 13:45-46).
  2. Nothing else in human existence should be of any ultimate concern—not even food and clothing (Matt. 5:39-42; 6:33).
  3. Trying to live for things of this world while committing oneself totally to God would be like a slave trying to serve two masters—it can't be done (Luke 16:13).
  4. Thus, one should give up everything—all possessions and everything that binds one to this world—in light of the coming kingdom (Mark 10:17-21). Those who give up their lives in this world will gain much in the kingdom that will soon appear (Mark 10:29-31).
- F. This emphasis on giving up everything for the kingdom means that Jesus was not a major proponent of what we now call "family values."
1. In fact, he was quite unambiguous that parents, siblings, spouses, and even children were to have no importance in comparison with the kingdom (Luke 14:26).
  2. Jesus appears to have realized how divisive this teaching could be, but he claimed that he would split families up rather than keep them together (Luke 12:51-53).
  3. As with other hard saying of Jesus, these should not be explained away so that they no longer mean what they say. Instead, they should be placed in their own apocalyptic context.
- G. Jesus' teachings on marriage considered in this context are different than some modern interpretations.

1. In his society, it was unusual for a man to be unmarried (as he was). Some were ascetics, as the evidence indicates Jesus was.
  2. Jesus never taught against marriage.
  3. In Mark 12, Jesus argues with the Pharisees over bodily resurrection, showing his belief in bodily resurrection into a state of no marriage.
  4. Thus, Jesus may be saying, "don't get married" (in view of the coming judgment).
- H. Jesus did not advocate a strong structure to promote a healthy society, because he thought society was diseased and soon to be destroyed.
- III. Jesus "maximized" the commandment to love and "minimized" everything else in comparison.
- A. This can be seen in the so-called "antitheses" preserved now in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel (Matt. 5:21–48).
1. The law says not to murder; if you really love your neighbor, though, you won't even get angry with him.
  2. The law says not to take your neighbor's wife; if you really love your neighbor, though, you won't even desire to take her.
  3. The law says to make the punishment of someone who has offended you commensurate with the offense ("an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth"); if you really love your neighbor, though, you will not demand a punishment at all or even take offense when he harms you ("turn the other cheek").
- B. This love of others should extend to everyone, even in the most extreme situations.
1. Rather than seek restitution for what has been taken from you or destroyed by another (as set forth in the law), you should forgive what others owe you—so that God will forgive what you owe him (Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4).
  2. You should not condemn even the genuine shortcomings of others—lest God judge the genuine shortcomings that are yours: "judge not so that you will not be judged" (Luke 6:37).
  3. You are to love even those who are your sworn enemies, who are out to hurt and kill you (Luke 6:27; Matt. 5:43–44).
- C. In particular, Jesus was concerned that his followers love those who were underprivileged and oppressed—the impoverished, the mentally diseased, the terminally ill, the outcast, the imprisoned. These people would inherit the kingdom when it arrived.
- D. This command to love one's neighbor had its corollary in the command to love God above all else.
1. The reason people could put the kingdom of God above all else—including food and clothing—is because God would provide all these things (Matt. 6:25–33).

2. People can trust God as a parent to give his children what they need. All a person must do is ask (Matt. 7:7–11; Luke 11:9–11).
  3. To those who trust God (that is, have “faith”) all things are possible (Mark 9:23, 11:23; Matt. 17:20), because God cares for his children and will give them whatever they ask—especially his kingdom, which is soon to come.
- IV. In conclusion, the more clearly ethical teachings of Jesus—some of the greatest ethical instructions ever heard in the history of our form of civilization—are not to be removed from their apocalyptic context.
- A. Jesus gave these teachings as interpretations of the Jewish law, especially Deut. 6:4 and Lev. 19:18.
1. Jesus, in other words, did not see himself as inventing a new system of ethics, but as explaining the Law of Moses in view of his own apocalyptic context.
  2. Those who committed themselves completely to God and their fellow humans in love would survive the coming onslaught.

#### **Essential Reading:**

Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet*, chap. 10.

Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, chaps. 11–13.

Meier, *A Marginal Jew*.

#### **Suggested Reading:**

Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth*.

Chilton and Evans, *Authenticating the Words of Jesus*.

#### **Questions to Consider:**

1. If Jesus was so Jewish in his basic orientation and his teaching, why do you suppose the religion that later developed in his name became so emphatically anti-Jewish?
2. Discuss how the apocalyptic character of Jesus’ proclamation can change one’s understanding of his teachings about loving one’s neighbor as oneself. Does it seem appropriate to you to reinterpret Jesus’ teachings that a person should give up everything for the kingdom so that they no longer require a person to give up a single thing?

## **Lecture Seventeen**

### **The Deeds of Jesus**

**Scope:** The previous lectures discussed some of the evidence that has led many scholars to think that Jesus was a Jewish apocalypticist. Other scholars have begun to question this view. In this lecture, I will evaluate two of the ways that such scholars have tried to explain away the early evidence for an apocalyptic understanding of Jesus. I will then discuss how the activities of Jesus that can be established as historically probable also fit well into an apocalyptic framework.

### **Outline**

- I. Jesus' apocalyptic focus also allows us to better understand the kinds of things that he is known to have done. His deeds are established by considering the reports in the Gospels in light of the historical criteria we have established.
  - A. Before getting into this discussion of Jesus' deeds, I want to stress that simply citing some verses and drawing conclusions are not adequate measures to justify a different way of understanding Jesus.
    1. We have seen substantial evidence that Jesus' ministry was rooted in his apocalyptic views of the coming of a kingdom on earth.
    2. Anyone who poses an alternative view must also work it out on the basis of evidence.
    3. Some scholars have tried to do just that, to argue that Jesus was not an apocalypticist, even though our earliest sources independently indicate that he was.
  - B. One way to get around the problem of our early sources is by arguing that these sources—for example, Mark, Q, M, and L—are not the earliest ones. This is the view, for example, espoused by John Dominic Crossan, a member of the so-called "Jesus Seminar," whose books on the historical Jesus are among the most popular in the market.
    1. Crossan thinks that Jesus was not a Jewish apocalypticist but obviously has to contend with the problem of the sources, which he does with wit and verve—and ingenuity.
    2. Crossan claims that other lesser-known sources not found in the New Testament—including such documents as the Gospel of Peter and the Gospel of the Hebrews—preserve traditions that are much older than those found in the canonical sources. Because none of these other sources portrays Jesus as an apocalypticist, for Crossan, he evidently was not one.
    3. The problem is that the documents Crossan refers to date from much later times. The Gospel of the Hebrews, for example, is not even mentioned or alluded to until the end of the second century.

To say that it preserves traditions that are older than those found in a Gospel produced a full century or more earlier (Mark) is certainly possible, but it stretches one's credulity.

4. When the sources that virtually everyone agrees were produced first preserve traditions that portray Jesus apocalyptically and sources that virtually everyone agrees were produced later preserve traditions in which he is not portrayed apocalyptically, a trend is suggested.
- C. Another way around the problem is to claim that these earliest sources do not portray Jesus as an apocalypticist.
  1. This, too, is a bit problematic, because apocalyptic materials are found, for example, throughout Mark and Q.
  2. Some scholars are convinced that Q is not only much earlier than Mark but also is not apocalyptic. Many members of the "Jesus Seminar" take this position.
  3. That, too, is hard to maintain, because Q does contain apocalyptic traditions on the lips of Jesus (e.g., Luke 12:39 = Matt. 24:44; Luke 17:24, 26–27, 30 = Matt. 24:27, 37–39).
  4. Proponents of a non-apocalyptic Jesus claim that even though our version of Q is apocalyptic, an earlier version of the document was non-apocalyptic—and that later an editor inserted apocalyptic traditions into the text. This later corrupted version of Q was then used by Matthew and Luke.
  5. Remember that we don't even have Q. It's hard enough to claim that an ancient document in our possession went through multiple editions and to determine what it looked like at every stage; to do so for a document that we *don't* have is really far more than is possible with such limited data.
- D. In short, it is very difficult to get around the problem that our earliest sources independently show Jesus to be an apocalypticist. Moreover, both his words and deeds make sense in an apocalyptic context.

- II. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, which demonstrates that he began his ministry by adopting an apocalyptic perspective.
  - A. We have already seen that this is one of the most securely rooted traditions in the early sources; it passes all three criteria with flying colors.
  - B. John proclaimed an apocalyptic message, as seen, for example, in Q (Luke 3:9). It is hard to imagine why Jesus would have chosen to associate himself with the Baptist if he didn't agree with John's message, because he could have easily associated with someone else (e.g., with a Pharisee or with the Essenes).
  - C. The baptism of Jesus shows that he essentially agreed with John in his apocalyptic message, although some scholars argue that Jesus later changed his mind. The evidence we have doesn't support this argument.

- D. A similar conclusion can be drawn from Jesus' decision to call twelve disciples, one of the most well attested traditions in our sources.
1. All the Synoptics agree that there were twelve insiders among Jesus' followers, but they don't agree on the names of who these twelve were (cf. Mark 3:14–19 and Luke 6:12–16). This evidence shows that it was known that there were twelve of them.
  2. Moreover, the tradition is supported by Paul, John, and Acts (1 Cor. 15:5; John 6:67; Acts 6:2).
  3. In addition, some of the sayings about the twelve appear to pass the criterion of dissimilarity. This is especially true of the Q saying of Jesus to his disciples that they would sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel in the coming kingdom (Matt. 19:28). No one would have made this saying up later, knowing full well that one of the twelve (Judas) betrayed Jesus.
- E. This saying of Jesus (Matt 19:28; cf. Luke 22:30) may provide a key to the significance of the number twelve. It was a symbolic number in light of the ancient tradition that Israel had originally been formed by twelve tribes.
1. The twelve disciples, therefore, represented true Israel and it was they—the ones who adhered to Jesus' teachings—who were the true people of God.
  2. Notice that in the Q saying, the focus is on their future role as rulers in the kingdom of God.
  3. This aspect of Jesus' teaching may have been responsible for another well-documented tradition in our sources—that the disciples had allowed their future prominence to go to their heads. Jesus constantly had to remind them that the first shall be last and that only those who humbled themselves like children and slaves would be allowed to enter into the kingdom (cf. Mark 9:33–37, 10:35–44 with Matt. 19–39).

III. Among Jesus' other activities, his associations with the wicked and the outcast are particularly prominent.

- A. His companionship with prostitutes, tax collectors (who were generally regarded as corrupt and collaborators with the Romans), and sinners (i.e., those who had no concern to keep the law) is attested throughout the early traditions of Mark, Q, M, and L (e.g., Mark 2:15–167; Matt. 11:19, 21, 31–32; Luke 15:1).
- B. Moreover, this is not the kind of tradition that Jesus' later followers, concerned about his reputation, would have likely invented.
- C. Jesus' choice to associate with sinners and outcasts make sense in light of his apocalyptic message. The kingdom would come to these people, not to the rich, eminent, powerful, and religious (cf. Mark 21:31 and Matt. 21:31 and its reversal of fortunes with the coming of the kingdom).

D. Jesus also clearly associated with women in public.

1. This is multiply attested in our traditions (e.g., Mark 15:40–451; Gospel of Thomas 114; Luke 8:1–3; John 4; and so on).
2. These associations are significant, because women were widely regarded as inferior to men and, at least in Palestine, were restricted in their abilities to engage in public activities.
3. This also makes sense in an apocalyptic context. Remember the kingdom would have complete equality, and those who were oppressed would be exalted. Women were drawn to this message..

IV. Jesus' activities during his public ministry largely consisted of traveling through Galilee, proclaiming his gospel, and gathering followers.

A. We do not know how long this ministry lasted.

1. In Mark's Gospel it appears to last only a matter of months, from the early summer when grain had begun to ripen (Mark 2:23) until the Passover feast the following spring (14:12).
2. John's later account, though, speaks of three Passover feasts (2:13, 6:4, 11:55), so the ministry must be assumed to have lasted at least a bit over two years.

B. Jesus' ministry was probably restricted to rural areas.

1. Jesus is never said to have visited the major city of Sepphoris, even though it was just a few miles from Nazareth, or any of the other major cities of Galilee.
2. He is always in the small towns and villages and in the fields outside (e.g., Mark 1:45, 3:7, 4:1, and so on).
3. He appears to have used Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee, as his base of operation. This tradition is multiply attested (Mark 1:21, 2:1; Matt. 4:13; John 2:12, 6:59), and it's hard to see why Christians would have made it up.

C. His ministry was almost exclusively to fellow Jews, whom he tried to convince, through his proclamations and interpretations of Scripture, that they needed to repent and turn to God in view of the coming destruction.

V. In light of the foregoing discussion, we can say that the most well attested deeds of Jesus all support the notion that Jesus was an apocalypticist, concerned to bring his message of the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God to the people of Israel before it was too late.

### **Essential Reading:**

Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet*, chap. 11.

Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, chaps. 11–13.

Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, chap. 3.

### **Suggested Reading:**

Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth*.

Chilton and Evans, *Authenticating the Deeds of Jesus*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. In this lecture, we have considered a number of Jesus' most well documented activities and associations from an apocalyptic perspective, but by no means all of them. Just to pick one other—how might Jesus' well-documented fondness for children fit into his overall apocalyptic message?
2. Discuss Jesus' decision to associate with outcasts and sinners. Is it really plausible that he thought wicked people would come into God's kingdom before those who tried to be righteous? If so, what light might that cast on people today—even Christian people—who are bent on being highly moral instead of sinful?

## Lecture Eighteen

### Still Other Words and Deeds

**Scope:** The most commonly reported activities of Jesus are his miracles, especially his abilities to cast out demons and heal the sick. The reports of Jesus' miracles create special problems for historians, not because they must take the philosophical view of the Enlightenment that miracles cannot happen, but because even if one concedes that miracles can happen, historians cannot demonstrate them. Historians are restricted to marshaling evidence from the public record, available to all people of every religious conviction, concerning what probably happened in the past. Because historians work with probabilities (never absolute certainties) and because miracles by their very nature are the most improbable of events, historians can never show that they probably happened. The historian can, though, discuss the reports of miracles and that is what we will do in this lecture. We will also address the issue of the relationship of the present to the future in Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom. Was it, as some scholars assert, present and perhaps complete in Jesus' earthly ministry, or was it a Kingdom yet to come, brought by the Son of Man in judgement.

### Outline

- I. The ubiquitous Gospel reports of Jesus' miracles create special problems for historians, who are committed to establishing what probably happened in the past.
  - A. These miracle traditions create a special problem for historians. Some people since the Enlightenment have insisted that miracles cannot happen. For such people, because miracles don't happen, Jesus did not do miracles. This view can be called the "philosophical" problem of miracle. I want to state emphatically that this is not the issue I want to address in this lecture.
  - B. For the sake of the argument, I'm willing to concede that miracles can and do happen. Even if miracles are possible, however, the historian still has no way to show that they have ever happened. I'll call this the "historical" problem of miracle.
- II. We must begin by comparing the ways in which historians engage in their craft to the ways in which natural scientists engage in theirs.
  - A. The natural sciences operate through repeated experimentation, seeking to establish predictive probabilities based on past occurrences. might call "presumptive probability." A "miracle" would involve a violation of this known working of nature.

- B. The historical disciplines are not like the natural sciences, in part because they are concerned with establishing what *has happened* in the past, as opposed to predicting what *will happen* in the future, and in part because they cannot operate through repeated experimentation.
  - 1. An occurrence is a one-time proposition; once it has happened, it is over and done with.
  - 2. Because historians cannot repeat the past to establish what has probably happened, there will always be less certainty about past events. The farther back you go in history, the harder it is to mount a convincing case for a miracle.
- C. This is what makes alleged miracles so problematic.
  - 1. Most things that happen are not so unlikely as to defy the imagination, because they happen more or less all the time.
  - 2. What about events that do not happen all the time? As events that defy all probabilities, miracles create an inescapable dilemma for the historian.
- D. For historians, a miracle can never be the most probable occurrence. That means that historians can never show—by the very nature of the case, given the constraints imposed on them by historical methods—that miracles probably happened.
  - 1. This is a problem for all historians of every religious or even non-religious stripe.
  - 2. Even if otherwise good sources exist for a miraculous event, the very nature of the historical discipline prevents the historian from arguing for its probability. By their very nature, miracles are the least probable occurrence in any given instance.
- E. A related issue is that the only kind of evidence that historians can look at is what is available in the public record.
  - 1. The historian has no access to “supernatural forces,” only to events that can be observed and interpreted by any reasonable person, of whatever religious persuasion.
  - 2. If a miracle requires belief in the supernatural realm, but historians—when they are acting as historians—have access only to the natural realm, then they can never even discuss the probabilities of a miracle.
- F. I should emphasize that historians do not have to deny the possibility of miracles or deny that miracles have actually happened in the past.
  - 1. Many historians, including Christians, Jews, and Muslims, believe that miracles have happened.
  - 3. When they think or say this, however, they do so not as historians but as believers
  - 4. In this discussion, I am not taking the position of the believer; I am taking the position of the historian.

4. When reconstructing Jesus' activities, I will not affirm or deny the miracles that he is reported to have done. These events—even if they did happen—are beyond the purview of the historian. As a historian, however, I can talk about the reports of his miracles, because these are a matter of public record.

### III. Jesus clearly had the reputation of being an exorcist.

- A. The accounts of his exorcisms are multiply attested; they are found throughout Mark, M, and L. But how about the other criteria?
  1. The accounts cannot pass the criterion of dissimilarity, because followers who believed that Jesus was could overcome the forces of evil may well have made up stories to show that he did.
  2. The accounts pass contextual credibility only to the extent that other miracles workers, such as the pagan Apollonius of Tyana and some other Jewish holy men, were also thought to have power over.
  3. The historian cannot say that demons—real live supernatural spirits that invade human bodies—were actually cast out of people. To do so would be to transcend the boundaries of the historical method
  4. We certainly can say that Jesus was widely recognized by people of his own time—who did believe that demons existed and could be exorcised—to have the powers to cast them out.
- B. What is especially interesting for the historian is how these alleged miracles were interpreted by Jesus' earliest followers.
  1. When Jesus is charged with casting out demons by the power of Satan, he responds by saying, "If I cast demons out by Beelzeboul, by whom do your sons cast them out? But if I cast demons out by the spirit of God, behold the Kingdom of God is come upon you" (Matt. 12:27–30; cf. Luke 11:19–23).
  2. Notice that everyone—Jesus and his opponents—admits that both Jesus and other Jewish exorcists can cast out demons. Even more important, Jesus' exorcisms are interpreted apocalyptically. They show that the kingdom of God was at hand.
  3. It is striking that this apocalyptic view is the earliest understanding of the widespread tradition that Jesus could cast out demons.

### IV. Similar results accrue to a historical understanding of Jesus' miracles of healing.

- A. The reports of his abilities to heal the sick and raise the dead are multiply attested, but they cannot pass the criterion of dissimilarity.
- B. Even more significant is the interpretation commonly given to his ability to heal.
  1. His healing miracles were not taken to be signs that Jesus was God. They were the sorts of things that Jewish prophets did. Jesus simply

did them better than anyone else. The earliest traditions assign apocalyptic meaning to these acts.

2. Recall that in the kingdom, disease and death would no longer exist. Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead. In a small way, then, the kingdom was already becoming manifest.
3. According to an account in Q, when John the Baptist wanted to know whether Jesus was the final prophet before the end or whether another one could be expected, Jesus reportedly replied:  
Tell John the things you have seen and heard: the blind are regaining their sight, the lame are starting to walk, the lepers are being cleansed, the deaf are starting to hear, the dead are being raised, and the poor are hearing the good news! (Luke 7:22; Q; 4
4. Again, Jesus' miracles are interpreted apocalyptically to show that the end had arrived and a final climax was soon to come.

V. This leads us to a final point: To what extent did Jesus proclaim that the end had already begun to make itself manifest? Scholars have long debated the extent to which Jesus thought that the kingdom had already arrived.

A. Some have gone to the extreme of claiming that, for Jesus, the kingdom was already completely present and nothing more was going to occur—no cataclysmic break in history brought by God, other than the appearance of Jesus himself (this view is termed “realized eschatology”).

1. This view is largely based on such verses as Luke 17:20–21: “the Kingdom of God is in your midst.”
2. Unfortunately, the verse is not multiply attested, and we have seen many examples of clear apocalyptic proclamations scattered throughout the earliest sources.
3. In some sense, though, it seems as if Jesus thought that the end had already become manifest in the present.

B. Most scholars would say that Jesus understood that the kingdom had already begun to appear, but a cataclysmic ending was still to come with the arrival of the Son of Man.

C. We have already seen a sense of the coming of the kingdom in both Jesus' teachings of ethics and the reports of his miracles.

1. People who follow Jesus are to implement the ideals of the kingdom in the present. Because war will not exist, people should not commit any acts of violence now; because hatred will not exist, people should engage only in love now; because oppression will not exist, people should work for justice now.
2. The reports of Jesus' miracles also show the beginning of the kingdom in the present. Because the forces of evil will not exist, Jesus casts out demons now; because illness will not exist, Jesus heals the sick now; because death will not exist, Jesus raises the dead now.

- D. Many of Jesus' parables present this view: that the kingdom has started to appear in the ministry of Jesus and the lives of his disciples, but that what they were experiencing was merely a foretaste of the glories that were to come when the kingdom of God arrived in power.
  - E. The parable of the mustard seed (in both Mark and Thomas) stresses that the small and inauspicious beginnings in the present would erupt into enormous consequences in the end.
  - F. The parable of the leavened dough (Q) emphasizes that what is small and hidden now will affect the whole world later.
- VI. For Jesus and his earliest followers, the apocalyptic message of the coming destruction had serious implications for the present.
- A. Those who implemented the ideals would be qualified to enter the kingdom when it arrived with the powerful appearance of the Son of Man. They had also begun to realize what life would be like in that kingdom, which would be ruled by peace, harmony, justice, and love.
  - B. Those who saw in Jesus a great worker of miracles saw still further manifestations of the kingdom.
    - 1. Historians cannot affirm that Jesus did (or did not) perform supernatural feats that violated what we might call natural laws—that kind of judgment lies beyond the purview of what we can know historically.
    - 2. Historians can say that Jesus was commonly *believed* to have done such things, and that this belief was typically understood apocalyptically. By casting out demons, healing the sick, and raising the dead, Jesus was embodying what life would be like when the kingdom of God arrived.

### **Essential Reading:**

Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet*, chap. 11.

Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, vol. 2.

Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, chap. 10.

**Suggested Reading:**

Fuller, *Interpreting the Miracles*.

Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Explain why a miracle that was reportedly done by a modern faith-healer—even if attested to by eyewitnesses and discussed in the newspapers—cannot be established as historically probable. (If it seems to you that it *would* be probable if reported by eyewitnesses, listen or read through this lecture again and think about the logic behind the claim that historians cannot establish that a miracle, by its very nature, probably happened in the past.) Does the fact that it can't be established as probable mean that it cannot be accepted as true?
2. For the sake of argument, I presupposed in this lecture that miracles can and do happen (even though they cannot be established as probably happening). Now for the sake of a different argument, presuppose something quite different—that Jesus did *not* do any miracles at all. Assuming such a view, how might you account for the abundance of miracles attributed to him throughout the tradition?

## Lecture Nineteen

### How Was Jesus Received?

**Scope:** In this lecture, we will explore the traditions of Jesus' widespread rejection and some of his controversies with the Pharisees, especially over the meaning of the commandment of Scripture to keep the Sabbath day holy and the Pharisaic rules concerning tithing. We will then consider whether Jesus' radical emphasis on the command to love led him to violate the Scriptural demands for ritual purity, especially with regard to kosher food laws.

### Outline

- I. The past lectures clarify why Jesus would acquire a following.
  - A. To people who were suffering, he brought a message of hope, that God would soon intervene in the world to relieve their suffering and reward their faithfulness.
    1. The Romans and other evil forces would be removed from power.
    2. The poor, oppressed, and outcast would be brought into God's kingdom and pain, injustice, poverty, disease, and death would no longer exist.
  - B. His followers had already begun to form a tightly knit community organized around the principles of love, as taught by God in the Jewish Scriptures.
  - C. Jesus was thought to have done great miracles that showed that the kingdom had already begun to appear.
  - D. Many, perhaps most, people today assume Jesus had thousands of avid followers and only a few powerful enemies. This was not the case.
- II. Traditions of Jesus' rejection cover most of those with whom he came in contact: his own family, his townspeople, people living in surrounding towns and villages, the Jewish religious leaders, the aristocracy in Jerusalem, and of course, the Roman overlords.
  - A. The tradition that Jesus' own family rejected him is firmly rooted. This may seem hard to accept for those who know about the annunciation story in the Gospel of Luke (where the angel Gabriel informs Mary who her son will be). This story, of course, cannot pass the criteria of independent attestation or dissimilarity.
    1. The theme of Jesus' rejection by his family is attested in multiple and independent traditions and is not the sort of thing later Christians would be likely to make up. It passes our criteria.
    2. Early in his ministry, according to our first account, Jesus' family tried to seize him from the public eye because they thought he had

- gone mad (Mark 3:21); he in turn spurned them when they came to see him (Mark 3:31–35).
3. His brothers are said in a later source not to have believed in him (John 7:5), and he had no relatives among his closest followers. Paul implies that Jesus' brother James became a believer only after Jesus' resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7).
  4. Only the latest Gospel, John, tells us what Mary thought of him. It says that she was with him till the end, although the Book of Acts indicates that she was one of the early believers immediately after the resurrection (John 19:25–27; Acts 1:14).
- B. Jesus was clearly rejected in his own hometown in Nazareth.
1. This is shown by the rejection scene recorded in our earliest narrative, Mark 6:1–6 (cf. Matt. 13:53–58), and amplified by independent traditions in Luke 4:16–30.
  2. This rejection is supported even more firmly by Jesus' widely attested saying "a prophet is not without honor except in his own country" (Mark 6:4; John 4:44; "in his own village," G. Thom. 31). In the earliest form of the saying, Jesus indicates that the prophet is also dishonored "among his own relatives and in his own house," suggesting that Jesus was not well received at home.
- C. Other towns and villages of Galilee also seem to have rejected Jesus.
1. This is best seen in Q materials, which are early and appear to pass the criterion of dissimilarity:  
 Woe to you Chorazin, woe to you Bethsaida. For if the great deeds that have been done among you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago and sat in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you Capernaum, you will not be exalted up to heaven will you? No, you will descend into hell. (Luke 10:13–15; Matt. 11:20–24)
  2. Note that Jesus' response to his own rejection is couched here in apocalyptic terms of judgment, condemnation, and destruction.
- D. The widespread rejection of Jesus and his message would make sense of several other early traditions associated with Jesus.
1. In Q, he laments that even though foxes and birds have places to stay, he has nowhere (Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:58).
  2. In Mark and Thomas, he intimates that the reason the kingdom has such a small and inauspicious beginning is that most of his proclamation is falling on deaf ears (for example, the parable of the sower: Mark 4:1–9; G. Thom. 9).
  3. He claims, in a completely independent source, that he is "hated by the world" (John 15:18).
- E. Above all, Jesus was rejected by the religious leaders of his people.

1. At the end of his life, as we'll see, his rejection by the aristocracy that ran the Temple—the Sadducees and the chief priests—ultimately led to his execution by the Romans.
  2. During his preaching ministry in Galilee, though, Jesus had no confrontations with the powerful Jews of Jerusalem's Temple, but only with local teachers who belonged to the Pharisees.
- III. During his public preaching ministry, Jesus was harshly opposed by Pharisees and experts in the Jewish law (known as scribes), who thought that his teachings were wrong, that he misunderstood what God wanted, that he and his followers profaned the law, and that as a result, his powerful deeds could not come from God but were from the devil.
- A. The controversies Jesus had with these other Jewish teachers were not over whether the law of God should be followed, but rather over the proper interpretation of the law. These were internal Jewish debates, no more harsh or vitriolic than those going on between other Jewish groups, for example, between the Essenes and the Pharisees.
  - B. Some of Jesus' disagreements with Pharisees involved moral decisions that were made difficult by the fact that the Law of Moses was incomplete and ambiguous.
    1. An example is the law concerning divorce. Moses allowed a man to divorce his wife (cf. Deut. 24:1–4), but what should be the permissible legal grounds?
    2. Like some Pharisees, but unlike others, Jesus himself took a fairly radical stand, that the legal grounds provided by Moses were simply a makeshift measure and that God preferred people never to divorce (Mark 10:2–9).
  - C. Other disputes involved ethical and religious matters not directly dealt with by the law.
    1. As an example: Should one support a corrupt civil government (i.e., Rome) by paying taxes? The Law of Moses doesn't say, and different Jewish scholars had different opinions.
    2. For Jesus, given that the end of the present order was imminent, taxes were a matter of indifference: "Render unto Caesar the things that belong to Caesar" (that is, the money Caesar minted that bore his own impression; Mark 12:13–17; G. Thom. 100).
- IV. Far more vitriolic were the disputes Jesus had with Pharisees over the proper interpretation of laws that both sides agreed were given by God and were to be followed. An illustrative example involves the law to keep the Sabbath day holy—one of the Ten Commandments.
- A. It would be a mistake to accept what Jesus' opponents said and think that he both broke the Sabbath and encouraged others to do likewise.

1. In fact, it's difficult to find any place in the Gospel traditions where Jesus actually does anything in violation of the Sabbath laws found in the Hebrew Scriptures.
  2. Instead, in nearly every instance, Jesus has broken the Pharisees' interpretation of the Sabbath laws—for example, by healing on the Sabbath or allowing his disciples to pluck some grain to eat on the Sabbath.
  3. Healing on the Sabbath is nowhere forbidden in the Law of Moses, and Jesus is not said to have plucked grain on the Sabbath.
- B.** For Jesus, an overarching principle determines what is appropriate to do on the Sabbath: "Sabbath was made for humans, not humans for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).
1. This shows that Jesus affirmed the goodness of the Sabbath, but maintained that part of its goodness involved not imposing it as an inordinate burden on anyone. God meant the Sabbath as a way to help people, not hurt them. As a result, it is always right to do what helps others, not what hurts, on the Sabbath (Mark 3:4).
  2. To some extent, the Pharisees agreed with this judgment. We know, for example, that the Pharisees judged that if a farmer had an animal that fell into a pit on the Sabbath, it was all right to pull it out. (In contrast, the Essenes claimed that this ruling was far too lax, as we now know from the Dead Sea Scrolls.)
  3. Jesus alludes to the Pharisaic view in both Q (Luke 14:5; Matt. 12:11) and L (Luke 13:15), but takes it a step further: Humans are worth more to God than animals, so it's perfectly acceptable to do something that might benefit someone on the Sabbath.
  4. Moreover, it is multiply attested that Jesus cited biblical precedent for such views, pointing out that even in the Hebrew Bible, God extends his approbation of certain activities on the Sabbath (Mark 2:25–26; John 7:22–23).
  5. Any interpretation of the law that did not have as its principal aim the love of others above all else was, for Jesus, completely misguided.
  6. Thus, what put the Pharisees at odd with Jesus was how the law—in this case, the law to keep the Sabbath day holy—was to be interpreted, not whether it should be kept.
- C.** Jesus occasionally found the Pharisaic oral laws to be far too restrictive and counterproductive. An example is the Pharisaic law of tithing.
1. Moses commanded that ten percent of all crops grown should be given to the priests in the temple (called a "tithe").
  2. Pharisees were concerned, though, over what to do when they purchased vegetables in the market, when they didn't know whether or not the tithe had been paid. To guarantee that the law had been followed, Pharisees opted to tithe what they purchased, as well as what they produced.

3. Jesus didn't consider such interpretations, distinctive to the Pharisees, to be ultimately of any significance, in comparison to the need to love one's neighbor above all else.
  4. For Jesus, anyone who insisted that what really mattered to God was the amount of mint and cumin his priests had received was completely missing the point. What God wanted was a people committed to loving him above all else and loving their neighbors as themselves (Q: Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42).
- V. At times, Jesus pushed his emphasis on love to such an extreme that it seemed to others that he discounted the law, e.g., with respect to the laws of purity that are so central to the Hebrew Bible.
- A. At one point, for example, he denies the necessity of the Pharisaic practice of washing one's hands before a meal, washing done not to get rid of germs—these people didn't know about germs—but to become “ritually clean” before God.
  - B. In our earliest tradition about the matter, Jesus says, “There is nothing outside a person that can bring defilement by entering into him; but it is the things that are outside of a person that bring defilement” (Mark 7:16). In context, Jesus is not abrogating the Mosaic food laws, but denying the Pharisaic ruling that a person should wash before eating.
  - C. Jesus taught that what matters to God is not the oral laws of the Pharisees about how to keep Sabbath, what to tithe, and how to eat.
    1. Anyone who keeps the Sabbath, tithes, and washes his or her hands, but then commits murder or adultery, or deceives or slanders another, or exalts oneself over or oppresses others, has completely missed out on what God wants.
    2. The Pharisees, in other words, emphasized the wrong things. In Jesus' words from Matthew, they “strain out the gnat but swallow the camel” (Matt. 23:24).
- VI. It is clear that Jesus face widespread rejection among the Jewish people to whom he preached and had numerous controversies with other Jewish teachers of his day.
- A. It was not these legal disputes with the Pharisees that ultimately led to Jesus' execution. The Pharisees were not the power players in Jesus' day; they had no political clout, civil authority, or legislative jurisdiction. They were a group of highly respected and seriously religious Jews, but they were not influential, at that time, in political affairs. Their disputes with Jesus could not have led to his crucifixion.
  - B. The religious authorities responsible for Jesus' arrest and trial were the Sadducees and high priests in the Temple of Jerusalem.
    1. When Jesus left the familiar rural environs of his childhood and took his apocalyptic message of the coming judgment of God to the

- capital city of Jerusalem, he aroused the opposition of those who were powerful enough to silence him.
2. Once he offended them by proclaiming that they too would face God's coming wrath, his own days became numbered.

**Essential Reading:**

Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet*, chap. 11.

Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, vol. II.

Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, chap. 14.

**Suggested Reading:**

Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, chaps. 9–10.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How do you think we can explain the persistent report that Jesus was widely rejected by those who knew him, including his own family? How could they not realize who he was?
2. Think of the most heated arguments that you've gotten into. Are they with people who are close with you or with people you scarcely know? In light of your experience, what do you make of Jesus' heated disagreements with the Pharisees? Is it possible that they were at such odds precisely because they knew each other well and agreed on some of the most basic issues?

## Lecture Twenty

### The Last Days of Jesus

**Scope:** We have better documentation for Jesus' final week than for any other period of his life. He left Galilee for the capital of Jerusalem, Judea, to celebrate the Passover feast. It appears that he did not go to the festival as a pilgrim, but as an apocalyptic prophet to deliver his message of imminent destruction and salvation to the heart of Israel, the Temple of Jerusalem, to urge people to repent before it was too late. This lecture will discuss what happened when Jesus entered the Temple and caused a disturbance, an action probably meant as a parable, demonstrating in a small way the kind of destruction that would occur when the Son of Man arrived—the Temple itself would be destroyed. We will observe Jesus preaching his message and acquiring greater numbers of listeners frightening the local authorities, who feared riots among the crowds. They arranged to have Jesus removed quietly from the public eye. Before he was arrested, Jesus realized that his time was up and had a last meal with his disciples in which he may have informed them that his enemies were about to make their move against him.

### Outline

- I. We must draw a connection between the content of Jesus' apocalyptic message and the reason for his death.
  - A. Some hypotheses of what Jesus ultimately stood for run aground on this connection. They sound completely plausible in reconstructing what Jesus said and did, but they can't make sense of his execution by the Romans.
    1. If Jesus is to be understood as a Jewish rabbi who taught that everyone should love God and be good to one another, then why did the Romans crucify him?
    2. If Jesus was mainly interested in opposing the materialistic world that he found himself in, urging his followers to give up their possessions and live simple, natural lives, apart from the trappings of society, why would he have been sentenced to death?
  - B. Let me explain how I understand the connection between Jesus' life and death. In this lecture and the next, I'll go into some of the details.
    1. At the end of his life, Jesus brought his apocalyptic message of the coming judgment to Jerusalem. This judgment would be inflicted by the Son of Man, who would destroy all those opposed to God before establishing his kingdom.
    2. Those who refused to accept this message would be condemned—even if they, like the Pharisees, followed the Torah of God exactly,

or maintained the purity regulations of the Essenes, or remained faithful to the sacrificial cult of the Temple as the Sadducees did.

3. Religious leaders among these various groups, and the institutions they represented, would be destroyed by the Son of Man. So, too, would the Temple be destroyed.
- C. Jesus acted out this message when he arrived in Jerusalem. He entered the Temple and engaged in symbolic destruction as a warning of what was to come, overturning tables and causing a mild ruckus.
  1. This public display and its accompanying message angered some of the chief priests, who recognized how explosive the situation could be during the Passover.
  2. Fearing an uprising, the priests conferred, had Jesus arrested, and questioned him about his words against the Temple.
  3. Realizing that it would be dangerous to let Jesus run loose, the priests decided to have him taken out of the way. They could not handle the matter themselves, however, because the Romans did not allow Jewish authorities to execute criminals.
  4. They delivered Jesus to the governor, Pontius Pilate, who had no qualms at all about disposing of yet one more troublemaker who might cause a major disturbance. Jesus was then executed by the Romans on political charges.
- II. We are better informed about Jesus' last days than about any other period of his life. For the Gospel writers, his life was mostly preparation for his death.
  - A. Thus, the focus of the earliest surviving accounts is on Jesus' last days. Mark devotes five of his sixteen chapters to the final week of Jesus' life, and John devotes ten out of twenty-one.
  2. It is no stretch to say that the Gospels are principally concerned about Jesus' passion, that is, the accounts of his suffering and death. Some scholars have said that the Gospels are passion narratives with long introductions.
  - B. There can be no doubt, historically, that for the last week of his life, Jesus left the place of his public ministry, rural Galilee, and went with his disciples to the capital city of Judea, Jerusalem. Why he did so may not seem quite as obvious.
    1. A theologian, of course, might say that Jesus traveled to Judea to die for the sins of the world. This view is based on Gospel sayings (such as Jesus' predictions of his own passion in Mark 8:31, 9:31, and 10:33–34) that cannot pass the criterion of dissimilarity, in that they portray Jesus as knowing the details of his own fate.
    2. From a strictly historical perspective, that is, restricting ourselves to what we can show on historical grounds, we should recall that Passover was an enormously popular festival. Maybe, then, Jesus went to Jerusalem simply to celebrate the Passover.

3. On the other hand, Jesus' actions in Jerusalem appear to have been well thought out. When he arrived, he entered the Temple and caused a disturbance. He then spent several days, in the Temple, teaching his message of the coming kingdom.
- C. Given Jesus' understanding that this kingdom was imminent, perhaps it is best to conclude that he went to Jerusalem as part of his mission, precisely to proclaim his apocalyptic message in the heart of Israel itself—the Temple on Passover.

### III. The account of Jesus' "triumphal entry" is hard to accept historically.

- A. Even though the account is multiply attested (see Mark 11:1–10; John 12:12–19), it cannot pass the criterion of dissimilarity, because it is explicitly said to have fulfilled a prophecy of Hebrew Scripture about the coming messiah (see Isa. 62:11; Zech. 9:9, cited in Matt. 21:5).
- B. What we know of the political situation makes it even more difficult to accept the account as historical.
1. The week before Passover was a tense and potentially dangerous time in the view of the Roman authorities.
  2. This was the one time of year that the Roman governor, who usually stayed in Caesarea on the coast, would come to the capital with troops in tow to quell any possible uprisings.
  3. If Jesus actually entered the city with such fanfare, with crowds shouting their support for him as their new ruler, the king who fulfills the prophecies (who would, therefore, overthrow the current ruler and his armies), it is nearly impossible to understand why he wasn't arrested and taken out of the way immediately.
  4. Probably the most we can say is that Jesus did enter Jerusalem, that he was one of the pilgrims coming for the feast, and that he (like others) may well have come on a donkey.
  5. It is also possible that some of the crowds in Jerusalem had already heard about Jesus' teachings and remarkable deeds and, when he came to the city, wondered if this could be the messiah.
  6. Such speculation would not have been extraordinary. We know of other Jews both before Jesus' day and afterwards who were thought by some to be the future ruler of Israel. Typically, such potential threats to the Roman authorities were executed.

### IV. One of the most solidly established traditions about Jesus is that when he arrived in Jerusalem, he caused a disturbance in the Temple, driving out those who sold animals and overturning tables of the money changers.

- A. The account is multiply attested in both Mark (chap. 11) and John (chap. 2).
- B. To understand the event, we must have some background information.

1. The Temple compound was an enormous place. The walls around it were ten stories high, and they enclosed enough space to hold twenty-five American football fields.
  2. The Temple was the one place where Jews from around the world could sacrifice animals to God, as prescribed by the Torah.
  3. Jews obviously couldn't bring animals with them from afar; the animals had to be purchased on the spot. It wouldn't make sense to use imperial money, with an image of Caesar on it, to purchase animals in the Temple of the one God who forbade the use of images. A currency exchange was set up to allow the purchase of animals with Temple money.
  4. It's hard to see how the Temple could function without some system like this. Our early accounts, though, indicate that Jesus entered the Temple, drove out those who were selling sacrificial animals, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers.
- C. It is difficult to know, historically, what Jesus actually did when he entered the Temple and what he meant by it. Most scholars recognize that some aspects of the accounts appear to be exaggerated. This is particularly true of Mark's claim that Jesus completely shut down the operation of the Temple.
1. Again, the Temple complex was immense, and armed guards would have been present to prevent any major disturbances.
  2. Moreover, if Jesus had created a problem in the Temple, it's nearly impossible to explain why he wasn't arrested on the spot and taken out of the way before he could stir up the crowds.
  3. For these reasons, it looks as if Mark's account represents an exaggeration of Jesus' actions. Exaggerations aside, we're almost certain that Jesus did something that caused a disturbance in the Temple. The event is multiply attested in independent sources and the event coincides with Jesus' predictions that the Temple would soon be destroyed.
- D. For this reason, a good number of scholars—beginning in the 1970s with E. P. Sanders—have begun to recognize that Jesus' actions in the Temple were meant as a symbolic expression of his proclamation.
1. Jesus sometimes engaged in symbolic acts that illustrated his apocalyptic message (for example, by associating with tax collectors and sinners to illustrate his message that the kingdom was for the outcast and lowly).
  2. In view of Jesus' message of the coming destruction of the Son of Man, perhaps it is best to see his action in the Temple as a kind of prophetic gesture, an enacted parable, in which he demonstrated on a small scale what was soon to happen in a big way on the Day of Judgment. The Temple was going to be destroyed.

- E. It is hard to know, though, what exactly Jesus found to be offensive about the Temple, i.e., whether he found the priests operating it to be corrupt or had some other problem with it.
  1. The words quoted in the accounts may not go back to Jesus himself, because the charges of corruption in the Temple may represent later Christianization of the tradition.
  2. On the other hand, we do have accounts of other Jews both before Jesus (e.g., Jeremiah 7) and in his own day (e.g., the Essenes) who believed that the Temple system had become corrupt.
  3. As a country fellow from rural Galilee, who preached against wealth and power, the sheer opulence of the place may have made Jesus' blood boil on principle.
- F. There are two ways we can understand the significance of Jesus' prediction that the Temple would be destroyed in the context of his broader apocalyptic message.
  1. Jesus may have believed that the coming kingdom would have a new Temple, one totally sanctified for the worship of God. This was the view of the apocalyptically minded Essenes of the Dead Sea Scroll community, who were his contemporaries.
  2. Alternatively, Jesus may have believed that the Temple would not be needed in the coming kingdom, because evil and sin would no longer exist; therefore, the cultic sacrifice of animals to bring atonement would not be needed either. This view was later embraced by some of Jesus' apocalyptic followers, such as the author of the Book of Revelation (see Rev. 21:22).
  3. In either case, the implication of Jesus' actions was clear: For Jesus, the Temple cult and the officials in charge of it were a temporary measure at best and a corruption of God's plan at worst. They would be eliminated when the kingdom arrived.
- V. Jesus' dire predictions against the Temple did not escape the notice of those in charge, the chief priests who also happened to have jurisdiction over the local affairs of the people in Jerusalem.
  - A. These priests were mostly Sadducees, who acted as chief liaisons with Roman officials, in particular with the Roman prefect, Pontius Pilate.
  - B. At this point in our earliest account, Mark, Jesus begins to have serious arguments with the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, sometimes engaging in public debates with them and sometimes speaking ill of them to anyone who would gather around to listen (see, for example, Mark 11:27–33, 12:1–12, 18–27, 14:1).
  - C. Jesus spent the week teaching and engaging his foes in the Temple.
    1. His most explicitly apocalyptic message, in fact, is said to have been delivered there, according to all three of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 24–25; Mark 13; Luke 21).

2. As the crowds began to swell, Jesus evidently started to attract more attention. The Jewish authorities in the Temple became concerned about an uprising. It had happened before and was to become a constant threat in the years to follow.
- D. For their part, the Roman authorities were armed and ready to act. It was decided to have Jesus taken out of the public eye by stealth to avoid any problems.
- E. Before his arrest, Jesus had a last meal (possibly a Passover meal, possibly not) with his disciples, during which he warned them of the danger he was in. He infused the foods with new symbolism.
  1. The "Last Supper" is multiply attested by Mark (14:22–25; 1 Cor. 11:23–26; see also Matt. 26:26–29; Luke 22:15–20).
  2. Some of what Jesus says may pass the criterion of dissimilarity; e.g., that he would not drink wine again until he drank it in the kingdom, which assumes that the kingdom would come right away—even though the Gospel writers knew it hadn't come decades later.
  3. Jesus' realization of his impending arrest is not implausible.
  4. It is difficult to know exactly how Jesus phrased his words at the Last Supper, because the passion predictions in the Gospels are so similar to early Christian preaching about Jesus that the words may have been put on his lips.

### **Essential Reading:**

Mark 11–15; Matthew 21–27; Luke 19–23.

Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet*, chap. 12.

Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, chap. 11.

### **Suggested Reading:**

Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, chap. 16.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. Is it possible to think that Jesus was opposed to the Temple of God in Jerusalem (which God himself had ordered to be built and maintained) without thinking that he was opposed to Judaism itself? That is to say, how could he oppose the central institution of the Jewish religion without being anti-Jewish?
2. Explain the significance of the timing of Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem for an understanding of his arrest. Why does it matter, in particular, that he arrived in time for the Passover festival?

## Lecture Twenty-One

### The Last Hours of Jesus

**Scope:** Jesus was almost certainly betrayed by one of his own followers, Judas Iscariot. What is not clear, though, is what it was that Judas betrayed or why he acted as he did. It seems unlikely that he was hired simply to inform the authorities of Jesus' whereabouts, because they could have obtained that information without paying for it. The surviving traditions contain hints that Judas may have divulged insider information that was available to him as one of the twelve disciples and that was used against Jesus at his trial. We do not have good sources for what happened at the trial of Jesus, as we shall see in this lecture. But it is clear that the high priest and his council, the Sanhedrin, considered Jesus a threat and therefore turned him over to Pilate.

### Outline

- I. In this lecture, we will pick up at the point where the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem decided that Jesus had to be removed.
  - A. Jesus was almost certainly betrayed by one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot.
    1. The event is multiply attested (Mark 14:10–11, 43–45; John 18:2–3; Acts 1:16; possibly 1 Cor. 11:23) and is not the sort of thing that a later Christian would probably make up.
    2. Some question exists about the meaning of the Greek word for “betray.” One interpretation is that God is “giving him over” to his suffering.
  - B. What is not clear is what it was that Judas betrayed.
    1. The common notion that Judas simply told the authorities where they could locate Jesus apart from the crowds may be right, but why would they need an insider for that kind of information?
    2. Judas may have divulged something else, some information that the authorities could use to bring Jesus up on charges.
    3. It is striking that in the reports of Jesus' trials, he is charged with calling himself such things as the Messiah, the Son of God, and the King of the Jews (Mark 14:61, 15:2; John 18:33, 19:19).
    4. In the public teachings of Jesus that we have established as historically reliable, Jesus never calls himself such things. In our earliest source, when someone does call him the messiah, he hushes it up (Mark 8:30). Where did the authorities get the idea that he called himself such things?
    5. This may have been what Judas betrayed. We know that Jesus taught his disciples privately things that he didn't say in public.

6. Did Judas betray insider information? If so, we might have a clue about what Jesus told his disciples about himself.
- II.** We have several hints about what Jesus taught the disciples about himself that Judas may have divulged to the authorities.
- A.** The hints come by way of several curious pieces of information that look to be historically reliable.
    1. Almost certainly, the charge leveled against Jesus by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate was that he considered himself to be the King of the Jews (Mark 15:2; John 18:33, 19:19).
    2. Jesus never calls himself this in any of the Gospels. Why would he be executed for a claim he never made?
    3. In addition, during his hearing before the Jewish authorities, who held a kind of preliminary investigation before turning him over for prosecution, Jesus was evidently charged with calling himself the Messiah (Mark 14:62)—a figure of grandeur and power, widely thought to be the future ruler of the people Israel.
  - B.** Jesus spurned the title “Messiah” in reference to himself in public, but it is possible that in one sense he did think that he was the messiah?
    1. Jesus taught that after the Son of Man executed judgment on the earth, the kingdom would arrive.
    2. Kingdoms, by their nature, have kings. Who would be the king?
    3. Ultimately, of course, it would be God—hence, Jesus’ common reference to the “Kingdom of God.” But he probably didn’t think that God would physically sit on the throne in Jerusalem. Who then would?
    4. The earliest traditions also indicate that Jesus thought that he himself would be enthroned. For one thing, only those who accepted his message would be accepted into the kingdom.
    5. Jesus also told his disciples that they would be seated on twelve thrones to rule the twelve tribes of Israel. Who would be over them? It was Jesus who called them to be the Twelve. Moreover, his disciples asked him for permission to sit at his right hand and his left in the coming kingdom (see, for example, Mark 10:37). They evidently understood that he would be the ruler in the kingdom, just as he was their “ruler” now.
  - C.** Finally, at least some people during his life almost certainly believed that Jesus would be the future ruler of Israel. If they didn’t, we can’t explain why these followers thought he was the messiah after he died.
    1. Jesus’ followers would not have started to believe this on the basis of their later conviction that he had been raised from the dead.
    2. Before Christianity, as far as we know, Jews did not expect that the messiah would be raised from the dead. In no surviving Jewish text—whether in the Hebrew Bible or later, up to Christianity—is the messiah said to be one who would die and be raised up.

3. If Jesus' followers called him messiah later, after his death, they must have thought of him as messiah earlier, while he was alive.
  4. Yet in our earliest accounts, Jesus doesn't teach that he's the messiah and discourages his disciples from noising it about.
- D. The best way to explain all these data is to say that Jesus' teachings about himself were intimately related to his apocalyptic proclamations.
1. Those who heeded his words would enter that kingdom.
  2. This would be God's kingdom, ruled by his chosen ones—the twelve disciples on twelve thrones.
  3. Jesus would rule over the disciples. He, in effect, would be the king of God's coming kingdom.
  4. In that apocalyptic sense (and I would say, only in that sense) did Jesus think of himself as the messiah. He wasn't a cosmic judge, an authoritative priest, or a military leader. He was the one sent from God to proclaim the good news of the coming kingdom, who would be the ultimate ruler when the end arrived.
- E. Judas, then, betrayed this private teaching of Jesus to the authorities.
1. That's why they could level the charges against Jesus that he called himself the Messiah, the King of the Jews.
  2. He meant it, of course, in the apocalyptic sense. They meant it in a this-worldly sense. But he couldn't deny the charge when asked about it ("are you the King of the Jews?"), because that was how he understood himself, and the twelve disciples all knew it.

### III. It is also difficult to know why Judas decided to betray this information.

- A. Some people have thought that he did it for the money (see Matt. 26:14–15; John 12:4–6).
1. This is possible, but the "thirty pieces of silver" is a reference to a fulfillment of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible (Zech. 11:12); that is, the tradition doesn't pass the criterion of dissimilarity.
  2. Some argue that Judas grew disillusioned when he realized that Jesus had no intention of becoming a political–military messiah.
  3. Others have reasoned that he wanted to force Jesus' hand, thinking that if he were arrested he would call out for support and start an uprising that would overthrow the Romans.
- B. Each of these explanations has merit, but in the end, we'll never know.
1. Judas cast the money back at the Jewish leaders. Because priests were not allowed to use "blood money," they bought a potter's field with the silver.
  2. Judas died, either by suicide or some other cause.

IV. The early sources all agree that after a last meal with his disciples, Jesus was arrested by Jewish authorities (multiply attested in Mark 14:43 and John 18:3) who conducted a preliminary investigation against him.

- A. As local aristocrats, the Jewish high priests were allowed by the Romans to conduct and control their own internal affairs.
  - 1. The head of the group would have been the high priest, who during this time (AD 26–36), was a man named Caiaphas.
  - 2. There is nothing implausible in a local offender being brought before local authorities. In Jesus' case, the authorities were Caiaphas and his ruling "council," called the Sanhedrin (this also explains why Jewish police arrested Jesus, rather than Roman).

B. Unfortunately, we have no reliable way of knowing what happened when Jesus appeared before Caiaphas.

- 1. In part, we are hampered by our sources. According to the accounts, the only persons present were Jesus and the Jewish rulers. Apparently, none of Jesus' disciples was present.
- 2. The real problem, though, is that it is difficult to understand the trial proceeding, if it actually happened as narrated, because the charge of "blasphemy" leveled against Jesus cannot be rooted in anything he is actually claimed to have said (Mark 14:61–62).
- 3. It wasn't blasphemous to call oneself the messiah (as Jesus allegedly did)—this simply meant that you understood yourself to be the deliverer/ruler of your people. Nor was it blasphemous to say that the Son of Man was soon to arrive—this was simply to acknowledge that the Book of Daniel had predicted something that would happen in your own day.
- 4. Yet the high priest accused Jesus of blasphemy. Because no blasphemy was committed, it seems unlikely that the trial proceeded the way that it's described in Mark, our earliest source. (One could conceive of his statement as blasphemous only by assuming, with Mark, that Jesus was the Son of Man, because then Jesus would be saying that he had a standing equal with God. The high priest would have had no reasons to think that Jesus was referring to himself when he mentioned the Son of Man.)

V. We can say a good deal about Jesus' final hours before his appearance before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate.

- A. He was almost certainly betrayed by one of his followers, Judas Iscariot, who may have divulged to the authorities some of Jesus' secret teachings that he had given to the inner circle of twelve.
- B. These teachings concerned his own identity—something he was loathe to discuss publicly. Jesus seems to have thought that he himself would be appointed the ruler of the coming kingdom by God.
- C. Once the local Jewish authorities learned this, they had all the grounds they needed to make a quick arrest to get Jesus out of the public eye.

- D. Working stealthily, the authorities had Jesus arrested at night and brought him into an informal interrogation. We don't know exactly what happened there, but it clearly was enough to make the authorities to hand him over to the Roman governor for trial.

**Essential Reading:**

Mark 14–16; Matthew 26–27; Luke 22–23; John 18–19.

Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet*, chap. 12.

Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, chap. 16.

**Suggested Reading:**

Brown, *Death of the Messiah*.

Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Consider the various options for why Judas decided to betray Jesus. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of each option?
2. Why might some scholars doubt the historicity of the following stories found in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' last hours? What historical arguments can be mounted in their favor? Where do you stand on the issue?  
(a) The institution of the Last Supper (Mark 14:22–25; Matt 26:26–29; Luke 22:15–20; 1 Cor. 11:23–26), (b) Jesus' washing of the disciples feet (John 13:1–20), and (c) Jesus' prayer in the Garden before his arrest (Mark 14:32–42; Matt 26:36–46; Luke 22:39–46).

## Lecture Twenty-Two

### The Death and Resurrection of Jesus

**Scope:** One of the most certain facts of history is that Jesus was crucified on orders of the Roman prefect of Judea, Pontius Pilate. As a provincial governor, Pilate had free rein to handle difficult situations; trial by jury or due process were not required. We don't know why the Jewish authorities handed Jesus over to Pilate; they may have done so out of deference to Pilate, or because they did not want the responsibility, or because they wanted Jesus permanently taken out of the way and were not allowed under Roman law to perform capital punishment. In this lecture, we will try to determine what we can from the historical record about the trial and death of Jesus. We will also discuss the contradictory reports of Jesus' resurrection.

#### Outline

- I. We are not well informed about what happened at Jesus' trial before Pilate.
  - A. In an earlier lecture, I discussed Pilate's position—and power—as governor of the Roman province of Judea.
  - B. It is not completely clear why the Jewish authorities didn't handle the problem posed by Jesus themselves.
    1. They may have wanted to show deference to the Pilate, who was in town to take care of such problems during the Passover.
    2. The authorities may have been concerned about the large following Jesus was acquiring (if, in fact, he was acquiring a large following; it's hard to know). If so, they may not have wanted to incur any animosity among the masses.
    3. They may also have wanted Jesus taken out of the way—that is, they wanted him executed. Most historians believe that although the Romans allowed the local aristocracies to run their own affairs, they reserved the right of capital punishment for themselves.
  - C. It is difficult to know what actually transpired when Jesus appeared before Pilate.
    1. His followers who later told stories about it were not there, and the principal participants, Pilate and the chief priests, would not have been likely to release details to inquiring Christians later.
    2. The Gospel accounts of the crowds at the trial do not pass the criterion of contextual credibility. We know from Josephus that Pilate was a brutal ruler who did not cater to the whim of the populace.

3. The idea of the crowds calling for Jesus' blood does not pass the criterion of dissimilarity; later Christians telling the story may have wanted to emphasize the culpability of the Jewish people.
  4. We can trace this tendency through the Gospels in chronological order (Mark, Luke, Matthew, John, and the non-canonical Peter). This trend was carried out in church traditions in the second century, including accounts of Pilate's conversion. In other words, Pilate and the Romans became more innocent, and the Jews became more guilty as time passed. This overlooks the important fact that the Jewish leaders, not the Jewish people, instigated the arrest of Jesus.
- D. What is virtually certain is that the point at issue in Jesus' trial was, again, his own claims about himself.
1. Pilate would not have cared one bit about whether Jesus kept the Sabbath, or told people to love one another, or urged his followers to give away their wealth.
  2. He would have cared about things that related to his rule as a representative of Rome. Independent sources attest that the ground for execution was that Jesus called himself the King of the Jews (Mark 15:26; John 19:19).
  3. This tradition also passes the criterion of dissimilarity. "King of the Jews" is not a title that Christians themselves used of Jesus, insofar as we can tell from our surviving sources.
  4. Mark's account is not an eyewitness report, but it may not be far off in the essentials. Pilate, having heard from the Jewish chief priests that Jesus was known to speak of himself as the messiah (= "king" in this context), queried him about it. Jesus either admitted the charge or did little or nothing to defend himself against it.
  5. Pilate needed to hear no more. Jesus was a potential troublemaker who was stirring up the crowds and who thought of himself as a political usurper of the prerogatives of Rome. Without further ado, Pilate ordered him executed as an enemy of the state.
- E. The trial was probably short. It may not have lasted more than a couple of minutes and was probably one of several items on a crowded morning agenda. Two others were charged with sedition the same morning. All three were taken outside the city gates to be crucified.
- II. Crucifixion was a horribly slow and torturous death reserved by the Romans for the lowest of criminals.
- A. Romans did not think that death sentences should be carried out in a humane and private manner.
1. They used public torture as a deterrent, a way to show to that the power of the Empire could be brutally brought to bear against the body of anyone who dared to defy it.

2. Jesus was not the only person crucified in the ancient world. This mode of execution was common for slaves, common criminals, rabble-rousers, people accused of sedition. When the Roman general Titus overthrew Jerusalem after a two-year siege in AD 70, he crucified so many people that he ran out of lumber.
- B. According to the Gospel traditions, before being led off to his execution, Jesus was flogged (Mark 15:15; John 19:1).
1. Flogging, too, was a horrific punishment; the Romans used leather thongs with little pieces of glass or bone tied to the ends to rip off the skin and the inner muscle.
  2. The account of Jesus' flogging may be a Christian addition to show how much he suffered, or it may be historically true.
  3. Given that public torture of criminals from the lower classes was the rule of the day, the accounts are completely plausible.
- C. Jesus and the others would have been taken by soldiers outside the city gates, carrying their crossbeams to the upright stakes kept at the site of execution. We don't know the actual site.
1. The uprights were reused, maybe every day. There the condemned would have been nailed to the crossbeams, or to the uprights themselves, through the wrists and possibly the ankles.
  2. A small ledge may have been attached to the upright on which the condemned could sit to rest.
- D. We know a bit more about crucifixion now than we used to, largely because of an archaeological discovery made some thirty years ago.
1. The discovery was the partial remains of a crucified man, named Yehochanan, his ankle bone still attached to a piece of olive wood through which a stake had been driven. The nail had been driven into a knot in the wood and couldn't be removed.
  2. Yehochanan appears to have been tied to the cross by the arms; more commonly, a person was nailed through the wrists.
- E. Death by crucifixion was slow and painful.
1. It came not by loss of blood, but by suffocation, as the lung cavity distended and the person could no longer breathe.
  2. Death came only when the victim lacked the strength to pull up on his arms to relieve the pressure on his chest; sometimes it took days.
  3. In Jesus' case, death came quickly, within several hours—possibly because he had been so badly abused already.
  4. Jesus' disciples were not there with him, though some of the women who had accompanied him from Galilee reportedly looked on from a distance (Mark 15:40). None was close enough, though, to hear what, if anything, he said at the end.
  5. By mid-afternoon, on the day before Sabbath, he was dead.

- III. In several independent accounts, we are told that Jesus' body was buried by an influential but secret follower, Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15:42; John 19:38; G. Pet. 23).
- A. Some scholars have called this tradition into question on the grounds of contextual credibility.
    1. Crucified criminals were usually not allowed decent burials, but were left on their crosses to rot and be devoured by scavengers or tossed into a common grave as part of their humiliation.
    2. At least one recent scholar, John Dominic Crossan, has argued that Jesus' body was eaten by dogs—which is admittedly possible, but there is really no way, historically, to know.
    3. It does seem improbable that Jesus' corpse was left hanging on the cross. If it had been, his followers would presumably have seen it there later and been somewhat less inclined to maintain that it had been raised from the dead on the third day following.
  - B. We can say, then, that Jesus' body was probably buried somewhere by someone, either by the soldiers in a common tomb or, as the tradition says, by someone other than his family and closest followers.
  - C. The important thing, of course, is what his followers claimed happened next.
- IV. Christianity is rooted in the belief that God raised Jesus from the dead.
- A. Historians cannot claim that the resurrection of Jesus "probably" happened.
    1. Even if it did happen, historians would have no way of demonstrating it, given the limitations of what can be appealed to as historical evidence. Because historians can establish only what probably happened, and a miracle of this nature is highly improbable, the historian cannot say it probably occurred.
    2. Moreover, the sources are hopelessly contradictory, as we can see by doing a detailed comparison of the accounts in the Gospels. Who went to the tomb? How many people went? What were their names? What did they see when they got there? Whom did they meet? What were they told? What did they do as a result?
    3. Answers to each of these questions are not only different among the Gospels but also completely divergent.
  - B. As a result of these limitations, there are some things that we really cannot affirm as historians.
    1. We cannot affirm that Jesus really was raised (though we aren't required to deny this either).
    2. We cannot say even that he was buried in a private tomb.
    3. We cannot say that three days later that tomb was empty.

4. Nor can we say that three days later the disciples *claimed* it was empty and that he had appeared to them (we only know that later they claimed it was empty and that he had appeared to them).
  5. Nor do we know that all of the remaining disciples (Judas having killed himself) actually became believers.
- C. What we do know, though, is also important.
1. We know that some (all? most? a few?) of his disciples who knew Jesus had been killed claimed at a later time (three days? three months? three years?) that his tomb was visited by some of his women followers three days later and was found to be empty.
  2. They also claimed to have seen him alive afterwards.
  3. They came to believe that he had been raised from the dead.
  4. This claim completely changed their lives and the history of our world ever since.

### Essential Reading:

Mark 15–16; Matthew 27–28; Luke 23–24; John 19–20.

Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet*, chaps. 12–13.

Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, chap. 16.

### Suggested Reading:

Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*.

Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*.

Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*

### Questions to Consider:

1. Throughout the Gospels, words are attributed to Jesus from the cross. Explain why historians would have difficulty establishing these words as historically authentic.
2. Try to formulate what you see as the responsibility of the Jewish authorities and the responsibility of the Roman authorities in Jesus' death. Throughout the ages, Christians have charged Jews with the responsibility for Jesus' death; in more recent times, this charge is seen as an instance of anti-Semitism. Do you think it is? Why or why not?

## Lecture Twenty-Three

### The Afterlife of Jesus

**Scope:** The religion of Christianity is probably best understood as having begun not with Jesus' ministry, his death, or his resurrection, but with the belief in his resurrection among some of his followers. These first Christians were themselves Jewish apocalypticists, who believed that God would raise the dead at the end of time. Once they came to think that Jesus had been raised, they drew the logical conclusion: With Jesus' resurrection, the end had already begun. Moreover, because Jesus was the first to be raised, he was obviously a significant figure in God's plan to destroy the forces of evil. Christians who held such views had difficulty convincing non-Christian Jews who were expecting a person of grandeur, not a weak, crucified criminal. Jews and Christians engaged in heated debates over these passages. Even then, not every Christian understood Jesus in the same way. In most instances, the beliefs about Jesus that emerged were far removed from what the man himself was really like.

### Outline

- I. We can't really say that Christianity began with Jesus' preaching, because Christianity is rooted in a belief in Jesus' death for the sins of the world and his resurrection from the dead.
  - A. Whereas Jesus preached about the Son of Man, who was soon to come in judgment against the earth, the early Christians preached about Jesus, who had died and been raised from the dead. Or, to use an old formula, the early Christians appear to have taken the religion of Jesus and made it into a religion *about* Jesus.
  - B. Nor can we say that the new religion began with Jesus' death, because without a resurrection, Jesus' death is just another tragic death among thousands, even millions, of tragic deaths throughout history.
  - C. Nor can we say, at least as historians, that the new religion began with Jesus' resurrection, both because historians are unable to affirm on historical grounds that the resurrection happened (i.e., it's a matter of faith, not historical demonstration) and because if Jesus had been raised and no one believed it, Christianity still wouldn't have started.
  - D. Christianity, then, began with the belief in Jesus' resurrection. How did belief in the resurrection affect how Jesus' followers understood who he was and what he taught?

- II.** It is important to remember who Jesus' followers were. We know some of them by name: Simon Peter, James, John, and some other disciples, along with several women, such as Mary Magdalene.
- A.** We can assume that they were followers of Jesus precisely because they agreed with or were persuaded by his message. This means, then, that even before Jesus died, his closest followers—the ones who later came to believe that he had been raised from the dead—were Jewish apocalypticists.
- B.** Now comes the key question: What would a Jewish apocalypticist think about the resurrection of a great man of God?
1. Recall: Apocalypticists believed that the dead would be resurrected when God came in judgment. Such a person who came to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead would draw an obvious conclusion: The end of the age has begun (cf. 1Cor. 15–20).
  2. It is also significant that Jesus was the first raised: He is the one who has inaugurated the beginning of the end.
  3. The early disciples concluded that the end had started and that God had chosen Jesus to defeat the cosmic forces of evil aligned against him. Jesus had been exalted to heaven, but he was soon to return in judgment on the earth.
- E.** Thus, belief in Jesus began to affect how people understood who he was in relation to God, the world, and the salvation of the human race.
1. During Jesus' life, he had talked about God as father and likened him to a kindly parent. His followers came to think that Jesus was the one and only Son of God.
  2. During Jesus' life, he had talked about the coming Son of Man who would arrive on the clouds of heaven in a mighty act of judgment against God's enemies. His followers came to think that he himself had been raised up into heaven and began to speak of him as the coming judge of earth, the Son of Man.
  3. During Jesus' life, he talked about the kingdom of God that was soon to arrive and evidently maintained that he would have a place of prominence in it. His followers came to think that that was precisely what would happen; Jesus would reign as the future ruler, the King of the Jews, the Messiah.
  4. During Jesus' life, he talked about implementing the ethics of the kingdom. His followers came to think that the kingdom had already begun and that he was already its ruler. In fact, he was ruler of all things in heaven and earth—the Lord of all.
- F.** In a relatively brief time, the disciples shifted their attention away from the imminent arrival of the Son of Man and the kingdom of God onto Jesus himself, whose resurrection revealed that he was the Son of God, the Son of Man, the Messiah, and the Lord.

- III. Jesus' early followers, though, had considerable difficulty trying to convince other Jews of their claims. We have seen that Jews at the time had a range of expectations of what the future messiah would be like.
- A. Some saw him as a great warrior figure like King David, one who would take up arms against the foreign oppressor, drive him out of the land, and reestablish Israel as a sovereign state.
  - B. Others saw the messiah as: a cosmic figure of power who would come from heaven to destroy God's enemies or a mighty priest who was authorized by God to deliver divinely inspired interpretations of God's law. In every case, the messiah was a figure of power and grandeur.
  - C. Jesus, of course, was none of these things, but an itinerant preacher from rural Galilee who was crucified as a common criminal. Jesus' death showed most Jews that he was *not* the messiah. Most considered the idea that he was the messiah to be blasphemous.
    - 1. Christians today tend to think that Jesus was crucified, because that was what the messiah was supposed to do.
    - 2. Before Christianity, we have no indication that any Jew anywhere thought that the messiah would suffer and die, even for the sins of the world. Not a single reference exists to any such idea in any Jewish text—including the Hebrew Bible—before Christianity.
    - 4. Why then do Christians assume that that is what the Jewish messiah was supposed to do? Because that's what the early Christians concluded based on what they already knew about Jesus.
  - C. Early Christians began searching their Scriptures to see how these things could be.
    - 1. The Hebrew Bible did not discuss the messiah's suffering. Some passages refer to the suffering of a righteous man (cf. Isaiah 53), who feels abandoned by God, but whose suffering is accepted as a sacrifice for others.
    - 2. Some passages, such as the Psalms of Lament (e.g., Pss. 22, 35, 69) and the songs of the Suffering Servant of the Lord in the book of Isaiah (Isaiah 53), were taken to refer not just to *any* person who was suffering, or even to Israel as a whole (cf. Isaiah 49:3), but to the future messiah of Israel.
    - 4. Jews and Christians began to debate the meanings of these texts, and the debates continue to this day.
  - D. The point is that early Christians began to interpret Jesus differently once they came to believe that he had been raised from the dead, and they soon began to make exalted claims about him that they then went to their Scriptures to try to support.

- IV. Different Christian communities developed different understandings of who Jesus was. For the early Jewish followers of Jesus, it made perfect sense to call Jesus the Son of Man.
- A. That meant that he was the cosmic judge coming from heaven referred to in Dan. 7:13–14.
  - B. But what would the term mean to later communities of Christians made up of converted pagans who didn't know Dan. 7:13–14? It would probably mean not that Jesus was some kind of divine figure, but that he was a human—the Son of Man.
  - C. The early Jewish followers of Jesus would have had a clear view of what it meant to call Jesus the Son of God.
    - 1. In the Hebrew Bible, the Son of God refers to any human being who was specially chosen by God to mediate his will on earth—like King Solomon of old (2 Sam. 7:14).
    - 2. To Christians who were converted pagans, it would probably mean not that Jesus was a human who was in close standing with God, but that he was actually divine—the Son of God!
  - D. Eventually, Christians proclaimed both things about Jesus—that he was the Son of Man and the Son of God, both human and divine.
    - 1. By the end of the first century, with the Gospel of John, we know of Christians who called Jesus “God.”
    - 2. This was obviously far removed from what Jesus himself said. Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet of the coming kingdom; the Christians came to think of him as the creator of the universe. It's an astounding difference.
  - E. The various notions of who Jesus was affected the way each Christian community told its stories about Jesus. This seems to be a certain fact of history; otherwise, one could never explain why the stories were changed so frequently and in such different ways.
    - 1. Christians who continued to be convinced that Jesus was a righteous man, but nothing more than a man, would obviously remember his sayings far differently from Christians who believed that Jesus was God himself.
    - 2. The Gospels we have inherited reflect these differences. They do not really all say the same thing.
    - 3. As historians, we cannot take any one of these accounts at face value as preserving a portrait of Jesus as he really was. Instead, we need to sift through each of these portraits carefully and cautiously, seeking to determine the words and deeds of the man who stands behind them all.

**Essential Reading:**

Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet*, chap. 13.

Frederiksen, *From Jesus to Christ*.

Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*.

**Suggested Reading:**

Brown, *Death of the Messiah*.

Dunn, *Christology in the Making*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Take a passage such as Psalm 22 or Isaiah 52:13–53:12 and try to explain how an early Christian might interpret it to support the view that the messiah had to suffer and be raised from the dead. Then try to explain how an early Jew might interpret it in a completely different way.
2. Imagine an early debate between a non-Jewish Christian and a non-Christian Jew over whether Jesus was the messiah. What would be the strongest arguments on both sides?

For further background on the development of early Christian thought on Jesus, as reflected in Scripture, non-canonical writings, and other sources, we recommend the course *The New Testament*, also by Professor Ehrman.

## Lecture Twenty-Four

### The Prophet of the New Millennium

**Scope:** Ever since Jesus' day, some of his followers have continued to insist that his proclamation of the imminent end of the age is literally true, and some have set dates for when it will happen. One such case is Edgar Whisenant, whose book, *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Occur in 1988*, made an impact on parts of American Christendom. Another is one of the best-selling authors of all time, Hal Lindsey, whose descriptions of the end times have been read by millions. This phenomenon is not recent; nearly every generation from the beginning of Christianity until today has had its doomsday prophets, who have declared that their own generations would be the last. Two things can be said about every single one of these predictors of doom: every single one of them has been incontrovertibly wrong, and they all have been able to base their predictions, in part, on the words of Jesus. In this lecture, we will investigate such prophecies and argue that Jesus' message must be understood in its context to be fully understood. It cannot be moved to our context to predict the end times.

### Outline

- I. We have now completed our study of the historical Jesus. We have covered all the available sources for reconstructing his life and have discussed historical criteria that can be used to get behind the later portrayals of his life in the Gospels to see what the man himself was really like.
  - A. We have used these criteria to try to paint a coherent picture of what he said, what he did, and why he died.
    1. My thesis for the second half of the course has been that Jesus was an apocalypticist who expected the imminent end of the age with the coming of a cosmic figure of judgment from heaven.
    2. I've tried to show that all the sayings and deeds of Jesus that can be accepted as historically reliable fit well into this apocalyptic framework.
    3. I have begun to show, in the last lecture, how Jesus' own religion was transformed by his followers as soon as they came to believe that he had been raised from the dead.
  - B. In this lecture, I want to talk about a different kind of transformation of Jesus' teaching, one whose impact is still with us today.
    1. This transformation involves adhering literally to some of his teachings when the situation has drastically changed.
    2. Since Jesus' time, some people have continued to believe that the world will end soon. Most of them have based their beliefs on the

teachings of Jesus. Even though every single one of these prophets of doom, from the second century to the twentieth century, has been incontrovertibly wrong about their predictions, the business of predicting the end of the age continues to be alive and well.

3. I would like to mention a couple of the more interesting figures, starting closer to our own time.

II. The year 1988 was supposed to be the year the world ended. Proof was given in a widely distributed and remarkably influential booklet entitled *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Occur in 1988* by Edgar Whisenant, a former NASA rocket engineer.

A. True to its title, the book enumerated biblical and logical reasons why 1988 would be the year that history would begin to end, and how.

1. Sometime during the Jewish festival of Rosh Hashanah, Sept. 11–13, 1988, Jesus Christ would return from heaven to remove his followers from earth (the “rapture”), before a seven-year period of cataclysmic disaster on earth (the “tribulation”).

2. The tribulation would begin at “sunset 3 October 1988,” when the Soviet Union invaded Israel and began World War III. The crises that ensued would lead to the rise of an agent of Satan who would lead millions away from God and declare himself to be divine.

3. He would then try to take over the world’s governments, leading to a thermonuclear war on Oct. 4, 1995, which would devastate the United States (“you can walk from Little Rock to Dallas over ashes only”). The world would be thrown into nuclear winter (temperatures would never rise above  $-150^{\circ}\text{F}$ ), and the food and water supply would be eliminated.

D. Even though the book may sound like a quaint bit of Christian science fiction, it was read as Gospel truth by a surprising number of sincere and devout Christians. Within months, over 2 million copies were sold.

1. Many Christians pointed out that such precision is unbiblical, because Jesus is recorded as saying, “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only” (Matt. 24:36).
2. Whisenant was unfazed. After all, he had not predicted “the day and hour” of the end, just the week.

E. To buttress his “88 Reasons,” Whisenant used biblical quotations that co-literalists had a hard time refuting, e.g.:

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. (Matt. 24:32–34)

1. Whisenant pointed out that in the Bible, the “fig tree” is often used of the nation of Israel. The fig tree “putting forth its leaves” is a reference to Israel’s coming back to life after a long hiatus.
  2. Because the modern state of Israel was established in 1948 and because a generation in the Bible is forty years—*voilà!*—1988 must be the year of the end time.
- F. Whisenant claimed that many other biblical predictions, most of them highly complex, pointed to exactly the same time. One of the simpler examples was in Leviticus 26:28. God tells the people of Israel that if they are disobedient, they will be punished “sevenfold” for their sins.
1. Whisenant takes this to mean a punishment lasting seven “years,” and he notes that in the Jewish lunar calendar, a year consists of 360 days. Moreover, in a number of biblical texts (for example, Numbers 14:34), God reckons one day as a year. This means that the punishment was to last  $7 \times 360$  years, or 2,520 years in all.
  3. According to the book of Daniel, Israel’s punishment was to begin with the seventy-year oppression of Israel by the Babylonians, which started, according to Whisenant, with the reign of the monarch Nebuchadnezzar in 602 BC and ended in 532 BC.
  4. If the time of Israel’s punishment is to last an additional 2,520 years, that happens to bring us up to ... surprise!—1988.
- G. When 1988 came and went, Whisenant did not retract his views, but simply argued that he had made a slight miscalculation. In a second book published soon after his predictions had failed, he urged that 1989 would be the year!

III. The end never did come, of course. But the constant and inevitable failure of such projects to materialize has never seemed to have the slightest effect on their popularity. A clear case in point comes from one of the best-selling authors of the modern period, an evangelical Christian named Hal Lindsay.

- A. Lindsay may well be the most read author of the twentieth century. His most famous book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, was the best-selling work of nonfiction of the 1970s, with over 28 million copies in print.
- B. Lindsay was a savvy observer of the times with a knack for relating to, even mesmerizing, the average mildly interested reader—especially college students.
  1. His book reads like a detective novel and is packed with anecdotes, plausible historical scenarios, and predictions of mass destruction.
  2. Writing in 1970, Lindsay saw the world as the stage of God’s historical activities and the Bible as the blueprint.
  3. Lindsay calculated that a world war would break out in the Middle East in 1989, leading to an invasion of the oil-thirsty Soviet Union, a nuclear counterattack of a ten-nation European commonwealth, and the invasion of an army of 200 million Chinese.

4. At the end of it all, only the European commonwealth would be left, headed by a charismatic leader who was none other than the anti-Christ. The commonwealth would unleash its nuclear arsenals, destroying the major cities of earth.
  5. When there appeared to be no hope, God would intervene once and for all. Christ would appear from heaven to overthrow the forces of evil and set up his kingdom on earth.
- C. Lindsey insisted that his portrayal of future events is rooted completely in the Scriptures, which accurately portrayed the future of our planet.
1. The problem, of course, is that this claim has been made by every Christian doomsday prophet from the beginning. As always happens, when the predictions do not occur, the prophets must go back to the drawing board.
  2. What is most intriguing is that the evangelistic fervor never dies down with each successive edition.
  3. When it appeared to Lindsay that it wasn't going to happen as predicted, he wrote another book, *1980s: Countdown to Armageddon*, arguing that everything was going according to plan. The book was on *The New York Times* bestseller list for 21 weeks.
- D. Evidently, Lindsey's reputation has not been tarnished a whit by his failed interpretations or his more recent claims that UFOs are deceptive ruses by demons, who will soon stage a massive UFO landing to mislead earthlings into believing in life on other planets. His books and videos continue to be enormously popular.
- IV. If we had more time, we could detail other failed prophecies that have been made throughout the course of Christian history. It is worth noting, at least, that they seem to recur in almost every generation. I'll mention a couple of striking examples, not even dealing with the massive concerns among some believers over the approach of the year 2000.
- A. Possibly the most well known American failed prophecy was experienced by the followers of William Miller. Miller was a New York farmer who predicted, on the basis of a careful study of his Bible, that the world would end in a cosmic blaze of glory in 1843. Some among his thousands of followers gave away everything they owned in expectation of the day; some went to court to get everything back later.
- B. Even more significant historically were the predictions of the Italian monk, Joachim of Fiore, who demonstrated that the anti-Christ would soon appear and the end of the age would arrive by the year 1260. These predictions played a major role in theological reflections during the later Middle Ages.
- C. A thousand years earlier, we find an important group of Christians living in Asia Minor adhering to the teachings of a second-century prophet named Montanus, who claimed that the world was going to end

in his own generation. One of the greatest theologians of early Christianity, Tertullian, belonged to this group.

- D. Just over a century before that, we find the writings of the apostle Paul, which later came to form part of the New Testament—the earliest Christian writings of any kind that we have. Paul tells his followers that Christ will return from heaven in a mighty act of judgment and remove his followers from the world, both those who had previously died and, in Paul’s words, “we who are still alive.”
- E. These are just a few of the many, many prophets that we know about.
  - 1. Most of those who have predicted the imminent end of all things are lost in the shrouds of history.
  - 2. All these predictors of the end have two things in common: Every one of them was completely wrong, and every one of them could cite the words of Jesus in support of his or her views.
- V. Let me conclude by telling you my point in making this brief survey.
  - A. My point is not to stress the fact that Jesus got it wrong.
  - B. Instead, I think that his earliest followers got something right.
    - 1. I have to admit to being a bit hesitant to make this point, given the fact that these lectures have been completely based on a historical study of Jesus rather than on any theological set of beliefs—mine, yours, or someone else’s.
    - 2. To paraphrase the Hebrew prophet Amos, I myself am neither a theologian nor the son of a theologian. My concerns in these lectures are not theological. If someone were interested in theology, however, he or she might want to take heed of how the early Christians handled their traditions about Jesus.
  - C. One of the frustrations of the historian of ancient Christianity is that the early Christians did not preserve their traditions about Jesus intact, but modified them for new situations in which they found themselves.
    - 1. As we have seen, Christians had no qualms about making Jesus relevant for new situations, instead of trying to pretend that what was suitable in one context was suitable for another.
    - 2. Their willingness, even eagerness, to do so creates problems for historians who want to know what Jesus actually said and did.
  - D. But what causes such problems for historians may create great possibilities for theologians—or even believers—who are interested in something more than the plain facts of history.
    - 1. Those who refuse to recognize that every new situation is a new context and that new contexts require a rethinking of old traditions are committing the same error as those who refuse to recognize that Jesus must be understood in his own context.
    - 2. We can’t pretend that Jesus lived in our context and interpret his words in light of what they might mean today.

3. We also can't pretend that we live in Jesus' context and that his words are immediately relevant to a different situation.
  4. That has always been the downfall of the doomsday predictors: They have taken the words of a first-century Jewish apocalypticist and pretended that they were directed to the context that the predictors themselves were living in. These words may have provided hope for a better day to their original hearers. When they are removed from their original context and used without remainder in new contexts, they simply become shallow and false.
- E. Anyone who is interested in understanding what the words of Jesus might mean in our world cannot apply them directly to the modern situation without seeing how that situation is different from his own.
1. Applying the teachings of an ancient rabbi to a modern context is not the business of a historian, but of a theologian.
  2. The historian can recognize the dangers in assuming that the context of a person's words and deeds are unimportant either to their meaning or their relevance.

**Essential Reading:**

Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*.

Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*.

Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet*, chaps. 1, 14.

**Suggested Reading:**

Lindsey, *Late Great Planet Earth*.

Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*.

Wojcik, *The End of the World*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Why do you think so many people are interested in knowing the details of the end? Do the reasons for this modern concern seem to be the same or different from the reasons to be found in an ancient apocalyptic context?
2. For those who do not believe that the end is imminent and who think that Jesus was mistaken to think that it was, is there any relevance to his proclamation of the coming Son of Man? (I do not mean for this question to have an obvious answer.)

## Biographical Notes

### Alexander the Great

Alexander of Macedonia, otherwise known as Alexander the Great, was one of the most influential people in the history of Western civilization. Born in 356 BC to King Philip of Macedonia, he succeeded to the throne at the age of twenty-two when his father was assassinated. Driven by his desire for conquest and using his military genius and a ruthless military policy, Alexander quickly conquered Greece before moving his armies eastward to overcome Asia Minor, Palestine, and Egypt. His major conquest came over Darius, ruler of the Persian Empire, which extended his territories well into modern-day India. Alexander's historical significance stems from his use of military conquest to spread a previously unheard of cultural unity, termed Hellenism, to the lands around the Mediterranean. It played an enormous role in the history of Western civilization and, of course, for the New Testament, which was rooted in Hellenistic culture and written in Greek.

### Caesar Augustus (Octavian)

Octavian was the first of the Roman emperors, who transformed Rome from a Republic (ruled by a Senate) to an Empire (ruled, ultimately, by the emperor). He was born in 63 BC to the niece of Julius Caesar and was later adopted as the son of his great-uncle. When Caesar was assassinated in 44 BC, Octavian left Greece (where he was being educated) to avenge the death. In Rome, he joined forces with two other prominent aristocrats, Lepidus and Mark Antony, to form a so-called "triumvirate" of power. There were differences among the three, however, and when Octavian deprived Lepidus of his power and defeated Antony (and Cleopatra) in battle, he emerged as the sole ruler of Rome. The Roman Senate continued to exist, of course, and to exercise real authority. Octavian was bestowed honorific titles—including "Augustus" (= most revered one)—and power as Rome's "first citizen" and, eventually, the "father of the country." Octavian's rule lasted over 40 years (27 BC–AD 14) and is often referred to as the period of *Pax Romana*, a relatively peaceful time.

### Josephus

Josephus was born to an aristocratic Jewish priestly family in AD 37 in Palestine. He was highly educated and became an important figure in Judean politics. When the Jewish war against Rome broke out in AD 66 (a war that would lead to the catastrophic fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in AD 70), Josephus was given charge of the Jewish forces in Galilee in the north. His troops were no match for the Roman legions, however, who marched through the region with ease. Josephus later reported that when surrounded at the town of Jopata, his troops made a suicide pact to prevent the Romans from taking any prisoners. When the killing was nearly complete, Josephus and the one other remaining soldier agreed to surrender.

When brought before the conquering Roman general, Vespasian, Josephus revealed a prophecy from God that Vespasian would become emperor. Soon thereafter, when Nero committed suicide in AD 68, the imperial government was thrown into serious turmoil, with three different emperors appearing on the stage in less than a year (dispatched through assassinations and suicides). Eventually Vespasian's troops proclaimed him emperor. He marched to Rome, restored order, and settled in for a ten-year reign. As a reward for prophetic insight, Vespasian granted Josephus an annual stipend and appointed him to work as a court historian.

Josephus's literary projects over the course of his stay in Rome are important to posterity. He first produced a detailed account, in seven volumes, of the Jewish Wars. Then, some twenty years later, in the early 90s, he published his twenty-volume history of the Jewish people from the very beginning (Adam and Eve!) up to his own time, called *The Antiquities of the Jews*. Josephus wrote several other books that still survive, including a defense of Judaism against its cultured despisers and an autobiography. These books by a learned Jew from Palestine, produced with a full range of resources at his disposal, provide our fullest and best (and sometimes only) source of information for the history of the Jewish people (especially in Palestine) during the first century.

### Heinrich E. G. Paulus

Heinrich Paulus was one of the major figures in German theological circles in the early part of the nineteenth century. Born in 1761, he developed a keen interest in Semitic languages at a young age. While still in his twenties, he was appointed a professor of "oriental" (i.e., Semitic) languages at the University of Jena; soon thereafter, he became a professor of biblical interpretation and theology. Most of his career was spent at the University of Heidelberg (1811–1844), where he held a chair in exegesis (= interpretation) and church history.

Paulus is best known for his two major studies of Jesus and the Gospels, which have never been translated into English: *Leben Jesu als Grundlage einer reinen Geschichte des Urchristenthums* (= *The Life of Jesus as the Foundation of a Pure History of Early Christianity*, 2 vols.) and *Exegetisches Handbuch über die drei ersten Evangelien* (= *Handbook for the Interpretation of the First Three Gospels*, 3 vols).

In the first of these works, Paulus develops an "enlightened" understanding of the Gospel traditions about Jesus. He maintains that the miracle stories can best be explained by assuming that the disciples of Jesus misconstrued natural events that occurred during Jesus' ministry, thinking that they involved supernatural events. In Paulus's judgment, in no case did miracles actually occur; the disciples mistakenly thought they did.

## David Friedrich Strauss

David Friedrich Strauss was one of the pioneers of modern New Testament studies. Born in 1808, he studied theology and philosophy, first in Blaubeuren, then in Tübingen and Berlin. He was particularly trained in, and enamored by, the philosophical views of G. W. F. Hegel. At the remarkably young age of twenty-seven, Strauss wrote his revolutionary and massively influential study *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet* (= *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*) in two volumes. In this detailed and erudite work, Strauss argued that earlier interpreters of the Gospels, whether traditionalists who subscribed to the supernatural or rationalists who did not, had all misperceived the true nature of the early accounts of Jesus' life by thinking that they provided historical documentation for what had really happened. For Strauss, the Gospels do not contain historical narratives but "myths," i.e., history-like stories that evolved in early Christianity to relate the "truth" about who Jesus really was. These stories didn't actually happen but nonetheless proclaim the Christian message.

The book created a storm of protest in the theological and academic communities. As a result of his views, Strauss was relieved of his duties as a professor at Tübingen and from then on, had difficulty landing a regular teaching post. In subsequent editions of the book, Strauss retracted some of his more radical views about Jesus but later returned to them. Embittered by the controversies over his work, he continued to write in philosophy, theology, and early Christianity (as well as politics and biography) until his death in 1874.

## Albert Schweitzer

Widely regarded as the greatest humanitarian of the twentieth century and awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1953, Albert Schweitzer is perhaps best remembered today as a medical missionary in French Equatorial Africa. Even before beginning his medical studies, though, Schweitzer was already renowned both as a prominent theologian and as a concert organist. Born in 1875 in Alsace, he studied at Strassburg, Berlin, and Paris. His area of theological expertise was the New Testament, and he wrote important books on Jesus' preaching of the kingdom (1901) and on the apostle Paul (1911). By far his most important work was *Quest of the Historical Jesus* (German title: *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*; 1906), which discussed, with wit and penetrating insight, all previous attempts to write a life of Jesus. The book also criticized scholars from the beginning of the modern period (the end of the eighteenth century) to his own day for failing to recognize the importance of certain critical perspectives (e.g., that the Synoptics are better sources than John) and for overlooking the heavily apocalyptic component of Jesus' message and mission. This was the most important early attempt to push for the view that Jesus was an apocalypticist who must be situated in his own first-century Jewish context. In rough outline, this view has dominated scholarly discussion ever since.

## Annotated Bibliography

- Allison, Dale. *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998. The most thorough recent attempt to show that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet; the book is written at a scholarly level and deals with the issue of the criteria scholars have used to establish historically reliable tradition.
- Boyer, Paul. *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1992. A fascinating study of different religious leaders, writers, and sects in America that have maintained that the world was going to end in the near future.
- Brown, Raymond. *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke*, 2nd ed. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1993. A massive and exhaustive (but highly popular) discussion of the accounts of Jesus' birth in both Matthew and Luke; suitable for those who want to know everything about every detail of the passages.
- . *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*, 2 vols. London: Doubleday, 1994. A detailed and thorough discussion of the accounts of Jesus' last hours found in all four Gospels.
- Carter, Warren. *What Are They Saying about Matthew's Sermon on the Mount?* New York: Paulist, 1994. The best introductory sketch of what scholars have said about the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5–7, Jesus' best known set of teachings.
- Cartlidge, David R., and David L. Dungan, eds. *Documents for the Study of the Gospels*, 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1994. A valuable selection of ancient literary texts that portray "divine men" in ways that sound remarkably like the portrayals of Jesus in the New Testament. Includes portions of Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius*.
- Charlesworth, James H., ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983, 1985. The most complete collection of non-canonical writings of early Judaism from before and around the time of the New Testament, with full and informative introductions. Included are a number of "apocalypses" from around the time of Jesus.
- Chilton, Bruce, and Craig Evans, eds. *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus*. Leiden: Brill, 1999. Essays by prominent scholars, discussing how one can establish the historical probability of the accounts of Jesus' activities. Best suited for advanced readers.
- , eds. *Authenticating the Words of Jesus*. Leiden: Brill, 1999. Essays by prominent scholars, discussing how one can establish the historical probability of the accounts of Jesus' teachings. Best suited for advanced readers.
- , eds., *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the Current Stage of Research*. Leiden: Brill, 1994. A number of essays on important aspects of the historical Jesus. Some of these take exception to the view of Jesus as an

apocalypticist, preferring instead to see him as a kind of first-century Jewish Cynic. Most suitable for more advanced readers.

Cohen, Shaye. *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987. Probably the best place to turn for a clear overview of Jewish institutions, practices, and beliefs from roughly the mid-second century BC to AD 200.

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Dunn, James. *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*. London: SCM Press, 1989. A full discussion of the early developments of Christian understandings of Jesus, which is particularly interested in the question of when and how Christians first began to think about Jesus as divine.

Ehrman, Bart D. *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1999. Written by the instructor of the course, this study considers all of the evidence for the historical Jesus—including recent archaeological discoveries and non-canonical sources—and argues that he is best understood as an apocalyptic prophet who expected God to intervene in history to overthrow the forces of evil and bring in his good kingdom.

———. *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. A historically oriented introduction to all the issues in the study of the New Testament (not just Jesus and the Gospels). Designed for use as a college-level textbook and as a resource for anyone interested in the New Testament.

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Meier, John. *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol 1. New York: Doubleday, 1991. An authoritative discussion of the historical Jesus written by a highly knowledgeable scholar. The first volume provides one of the clearest discussions available of all the sources, including those outside the canon, for Jesus' life and of the methods scholars use to determine which of the surviving traditions about Jesus are historically accurate.

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———. *Judaism Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE*. London and Philadelphia: SCM Press/Trinity Press International, 1992. A detailed and authoritative account of what it meant to practice Judaism immediately before and during the time of the New Testament, by one of the great New Testament scholars of our generation.

Sandmel, Samuel. *Judaism and Christian Beginnings*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978. A well-written and insightful sketch of the Jewish religion at the beginning of Christianity. Suitable for those who are relatively new to the field.

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Shelton, Jo-Ann. *As the Romans Did: A Sourcebook in Roman Social History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Oxford, 1998. A terrific introduction to all aspects of Roman life; includes clear translations of selected primary texts organized according to social history and a useful section on Roman religion.

Stanton, Graham. *The Gospels and Jesus*. New York: Oxford, 1989. A solid and readable introduction to the major critical problems involved in studying the Gospels and the historical Jesus.

Stein, Robert. *The Synoptic Problem: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987. A treatment of the range of issues involved in the problem of establishing the literary relationships of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, with a discussion of the hypothetical source Q. A good tool for beginning students.

Strauss, David Friedrich. *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*. Ramsey, NJ: Sigler Press, 1994. Originally published in 1835–36 and translated into English from the fourth edition by novelist George Elliot, this revolutionary book argued that the Gospels are best understood as containing myths of Jesus, not historical accounts.

Tatum, W. Barnes. *In Quest of Jesus: A Guidebook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Nashville: Abingdon, 1999. A clear and readable introduction to the sources and methods available for establishing historically reliable traditions in the Gospels.

Turcan, Robert. *The Cults of the Roman Empire*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996. A superb introduction to some of the major religious cults in the Roman Empire from roughly the time of early Christianity (and before).

Vermes, Geza ed. *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 3rd ed. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1987. A readable and accessible collection and translation of the Dead Sea Scrolls in English, with a clear and useful introduction.

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## The Historical Jesus

### Part II

- Lecture 13: Jesus and Roman Rule
- Lecture 14: Jesus the Apocalyptic Prophet
- Lecture 15: The Apocalyptic Teachings of Jesus
- Lecture 16: Other Teachings of Jesus in their Apocalyptic Context
- Lecture 17: The Deeds of Jesus in their Apocalyptic Context
- Lecture 18: Still Other Words and Deeds of Jesus
- Lecture 19: The Controversies of Jesus
- Lecture 20: The Last Days of Jesus
- Lecture 21: The Last Hours of Jesus
- Lecture 22: The Death and Resurrection of Jesus
- Lecture 23: The Afterlife of Jesus
- Lecture 24: The Prophet of the New Millennium



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